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**Professionals under pressure:
a consideration of the experience of careers
guidance professionals post-privatisation.**

by

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A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	i
List of appendices	ii
List of figures	iii
Section 1 POSITION STATEMENT	
1.1 The context in which the research question was wrought	1
1.1.1 Paradox and pressure	3
1.1.2 The context for research into paradox and practice	4
1.2 Entry into the field of careers guidance	6
1.3 Entry into the management of guidance professionals	7
1.4 Making sense of the experience	9
1.5 Move into Higher Education	12
1.6 Engaging in research	13
Section 2 THE LITERATURE: RELATIONSHIPS AND CONTEXTS	
2. 1. Introduction to the literature	16
2.1.1 Relationships and power	18
2.1.2 Values in relationships	20
2.1.3 The contextual landscape	21
2.1.4 Nomenclature	22
2.2 Careers Practitioner to Client relationship in the guidance context	23
2.2.1 The intention of careers guidance	27
2.2.2 Autonomy as guiding principle in helping professions	28
2.2.3 Variation across contexts of guidance delivery	29
2.3 Practitioner to Manager relations: the public service strategy context	29
Rethinking Strategic planning in practice	32
2.3.2 The professionalisation of management	34
2.3.3 Public sector ethos	34
2.3.4 The tension between managerialism and professionalism	37
2.3.5 Changes to the careers service	38
2.3.6 Managing changing	41
2.3.7 Change for careers companies	43
2.3.8 Response to change	44
2.3.9 Organisations and learning	47
2.3.10 Psychological Contract	49
2.3.11 Emotional labour	50
2.3.12 Changing management practice	52
2.3.13 Public service reforms under Labour	54
2.3.14 The professionalist: managerialist paradigm	56
2.3.15 Lack of voice	58
2.4 Practitioner to Policy relationship	59
2.4.1 The emergence of a new public service management	62

2.4.2	Called to account	65
2.4.3	The Audit Process	67
2.4.4	Securing funding through value for money	67
2.4.5	Performance measurement and professional regulation	69
2.4.6	Professions and social accounting	73
2.5	The relationship between Practitioners; the community of practice	74
2.5.1	The role of learning within the community of practice	78
Section 3	THE RESEARCH METHOD	
3.1	Framing the approach	83
3.2	The research strategy	86
3.2.1	Phasing of the research	90
3.2.2	Developing the research instruments	91
3.2.3	Planning the pilot	93
3.3	The sample: access and composition	97
3.4	Focus group method	100
3.4.1	Is focus group method appropriate for this research?	101
3.4.2	What is a focus group?	104
3.4.3	Is focus group appropriate for this researcher?	107
3.4.4	Research phases	108
Section 4	THE FINDINGS	
4.1	The questionnaire data; sample X	
4.1.1	Choice of careers company X	110
4.1.2	Summary of key points from the data analysis	111
4.1.3	Questionnaire administration	112
4.1.4	The current experience	112
4.1.5	Terms of employment and experience	113
4.1.6	Work remit: education or labour market	115
4.1.7	The player-managers in sample X	116
4.1.8	Working to targets, post-incorporation & elsewhere	117
4.1.9	Previous experience of targets	118
4.1.10	Freedom and responsibility	120
4.1.11	Targets as framework for autonomous practice	121
4.1.12	Effect of targets on careers guidance	121
4.1.13	Measuring output	127
4.1.14	Effect on general morale	128
4.1.15	Managing others in relation to targets	131
4.1.16	A difficult balance	133
4.2	The questionnaire data; sample Y	
4.2.1	Summary of key points arising from the data	139
4.2.2	Access to the sample	139
4.2.3	Characteristics of the sample	140
4.2.4	Targets	142
4.2.5	Previous experience of targets	143
4.2.6	Pressure to service either audit demand or client need	145
4.2.7	The effect of targets	150

4.2.8	Creative accounting	153
4.2.9	Distance between practitioners and managers	154
4.2.10	Working harder	154
4.2.11	The next phase of the research	155
4.3	The practitioner interview	
4.3.1	Constructing the research instrument; questions & vignettes	156
4.3.2	Arranging access	158
4.3.3	Viable numbers	159
4.3.4	The practitioner interview	160
4.3.5	Approaching the data	160
4.3.6	Analysing the data	161
4.3.7	Management practices	163
4.3.8	Guidance practice	165
4.3.9	Managing pressures	166
4.4	Focus group 1	
4.4.1	Running the focus group	168
4.4.2	Analysis	169
4.4.3	Policy and change	170
4.4.4	Pace of change	172
4.4.5	Working in schools	172
4.4.6	Management	174
4.4.7	Dealing with pressure	175
4.4.8	Information technology	176
4.4.9	Guidance practice	177
4.4.10	Sanctions and rewards	178
4.5	Focus group 2	
4.5.1	Running the focus group	181
4.5.2	Analysis	182
4.5.3	Policy and the pace of changes	182
4.5.4	Working with schools	185
4.5.5	Management	187
4.5.6	Dealing with pressure	189
4.5.7	Information technology	190
4.5.8	Guidance practice	192
Section 5	CONCLUSIONS	
5.1	The effect of privatisation on professionals	194
5.2	Professionals under pressure: the kaleidoscope effect	196
5.3	Working in schools	200
5.4	Diversity in practitioner experience	202
5.5	Ethical drift	204
5.6	Useful theory	208
References		213
Appendices		

Abstract

The recent privatisation of careers guidance provision in the United Kingdom has resulted in major cultural change in the organisation of guidance companies. This research examines the effect this external change has had on the quality of working life for professionals engaged in the practice of careers guidance. The intention of the policy was to improve service delivery not the quality of careers guidance. Nevertheless, the implementation of the policy has had a discernible effect on the way professionals experience work and on the guidance they give. Questions of professional ownership and protectionism arise and are addressed with reference to guidance and ethical frameworks.

Field research was undertaken with careers practitioners working in the South East and in the North of England. The data collection comprised a questionnaire administered to these two groups, followed by focus groups conducted with some respondents from the South East sample. The concern was to understand how these careers professionals are finding their way in changed circumstances; the approach was phenomenological and interpretative (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

The findings demonstrate that guidance professionals are feeling under pressure from targets introduced after contracting out. Practitioners are struggling to satisfy the individual needs of their clients against policy requirements for standardised outcomes: a tension familiar in the professionalism and managerialism debate (Friedson, 1994; Edwards, 1998 and Becher, 1999). This pressure is exacerbated by the anticipation of further policy changes for careers guidance delivery.

Where the organisation sees the strategic imperative as contract compliance, commercial success has been at some cost to guidance professionals and their practice. A more explicit consideration of ethical practice during strategy formulation might be a way forward in the management of change in careers companies. There is evidence that policy fails fully to understand how careers guidance works.

SECTION 1

POSITION STATEMENT

1.1 The context in which the research question was wrought

Any research project needs to be situated within its context, for two good reasons. The first is to show how the proposed area of research adds to the existing knowledge base within a prescribed field of inquiry. Thus the claim for an original contribution to knowledge is put before the readership. The second reason is to give the reader some understanding of the derivation of the research focus, which may also give some understanding of the researcher who is conducting the inquiry.

This doctoral thesis focuses on the management of guidance practitioners in the wake of what comprises in effect a natural experiment, namely the contracting out of careers guidance. The Trades Union Rights and Employment Reform Act (HM Government, 1993) moved the provision of careers guidance from local education authorities to private careers organisations through a process of compulsory competitive tendering. The intention of these reforms was to improve the mechanism for careers service delivery, following similar public service restructuring in education, where initially schools were given the option of opting out of Local Education Authority (LEA) control and latterly colleges of further education were required to do so. Thomson (1992, p.35) identifies five characteristics of the public sector restructuring which preceded that of the careers service: the use of a national financial framework; the use of defined outputs; the introduction of a purchaser/provider split; the use of market testing and the use of contracts. With the exception of a purchaser/provider split, all these characteristics are discernible in the careers service reforms. The rationale behind the legislation

was to restructure public service provision in order to create better careers services; better being more effective, more efficient, offering greater value for money. The intention was never to change the nature of careers guidance itself:

‘ the stated rationale behind the establishment of the new guidance companies rested primarily on the need to develop more efficient and effective careers services rather than on the need to improve the quality of guidance provision. The focus, therefore, was on shaping the delivery mechanism, not the guidance process.’ (DfEE, 1996, p.43)

Change on this scale was likely to have an effect on employees within the careers services, the majority of whom work as careers advisers and who are qualified to deliver careers guidance having completed a recognised course of training. As Eraut puts it: ‘passing that point on a learning continuum which has been judged appropriate for determining entry to a profession’ (Eraut, 1993, p.17). The contracting process, which saw new careers companies rising from the ashes of the old LEA careers services, made extensive use of performance indicators including targets for discrete areas of careers activity, such as interviews with individual clients and groupwork delivered in schools and colleges. This particular aspect of the privatisation might be expected to have had an impact on employees and clients alike.

The first phase of the privatisation saw 13 ‘Pathfinder’ careers companies start operating from April 1994, with the remainder following in three later phases. In August 1996, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) published an evaluation of four of these Pathfinder careers companies in which careers advisers’ views were sought alongside the full range of stakeholders in the new companies. From this small sample of careers advisers’ voices, there was a tone of apprehension about the effect that privatisation was having, both on the careers advisers themselves and on the guidance they were now delivering: ‘careers advisers, whilst

recognising the need for accountability and ensuring adequate guidance delivery within agreed goals, often found the target culture stressful, bureaucratic and felt themselves to be somewhat disempowered' (DfEE, 1996, p.39). This was an area of inquiry worth pursuing. It was unlikely that the intention of the reforms had been to disempower careers professionals, yet that seemed to be one outcome. In consulting with stakeholders for this evaluation, careers advisers were included and their opinions were both sought and reported, but were not given any greater comparative importance. The focus of the report on the role of managers in delivering the changes and on the clients as end users of the service effectively sidelines the careers practitioners, who held the ground between these two groups.

1.1.1 Paradox and pressure

This research considers the effect of privatisation on guidance professionals. In one sense, this is a tidy, contained area of investigation. The focus is on the experience of a group of careers professionals engaged in guidance practice in organisations which successfully bid for a direct contract with a Government Department to deliver careers guidance after privatisation. I found myself intrigued by the possibilities of paradox privatisation offered. There is the paradox of managing autonomous practitioners, and that of practising autonomously within a target culture; irreconcilable tasks commonly undertaken in the new careers companies. In the evidence marshalled to sustain the claim of careers guidance to professional status, autonomy looms large. What this means is that practitioners make real time judgements with real life clients, drawing on a body of knowledge and exercising professional judgement. This freedom to practise is tempered by the guiding principle of responsibility to practise in the best interests of the client. But do autonomous practitioners need to be managed? Of course, this paradox was not unknown to guidance practitioners employed in local authorities pre-privatisation. I myself have worked, even as a probationer, to a Personal Operational Plan referred to as one's 'Pop' with a mixture of affection and disparagement. The Pop gave a

ballpark figure for careers interviews, group sessions in schools and employer visits. I have also worked as a manager of autonomous careers guidance practitioners, using some quantitative measures to facilitate fair allocation of workload across a team. Such numerical targets were tempered by qualitative indicators of peer and self-appraisal, which put trust in reflective practice and self-regulation as quality control mechanism. Moreover, the targets had no teeth. If you met them, there was no formal recognition or bonus and if you didn't meet them, there was no sanction, either for you, or for the careers service.

So, autonomy is critical in a claim to professional status. The need to manage resources is crucial in any organisation, but becomes critical in an organisation funded by public monies. The question for me became what would it be like to manage, as a practitioner, the pressure to practise well and the pressure to demonstrate value for money.

1.1.2 The context for research into paradox and practice

However, in order to make sense of the current paradoxical experience of the careers practitioner, there needs to be an understanding of the context in which they are operating, what kind of influences play on how these people carry out their work, and what knowledge and practice in guidance shape the decisions which have been taken about guidance provision and delivery. Careers guidance, both as a helping profession and a distinct body of knowledge is, as Watts puts it, 'essentially a 20th century creation' (Watts, 1999a, p.1). Whilst the earlier literature is important, as my own training in careers guidance drew on the literature from the latter half of the twentieth century, so this is the era from which I survey the development of careers guidance theory and models of practice. Derived from both psychological (Kelly, 1955; Roe & Lunneborg, 1990; Holland, 1966) and sociological thinking (Roberts 1977) it clearly falls within those applied sciences which deal with people, usually grouped as social sciences. Within the social sciences, just as new theories form the

basis for new practice, so the research undertaken to develop the knowledge base to underpin new practice will in turn, seek to identify a research paradigm that is congruent with the value system. Within this research tradition, the notion of researcher as participant in the research process is well established (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hammersley 1993b; Cohen & Manion 1994). The positivist approach to research assumes there is some objective truth, some rules or principles that will always hold good or govern (Black, 1993). The researcher's aim is to use objective method to provide evidence which will sustain generalisation to governing laws (May, 1993). Maintaining distance between researcher and subject lends authority to impartial objective findings, by allowing the reader to infer that the researcher is not influenced by findings, but presents findings which are factual. The participant researcher, on the other hand, acknowledges both her own position within the research process, and the interaction with the people who form the focus of the research inquiry. Personal reactions both to the process and the outcomes of the research add depth to the inquiry. Rather than aspire to a self-conscious, constructed separation of the researcher and the researched, the self-awareness of the personal development of the researcher threaded through the research study is mined for meaning with as much rigour and interest as any other data collected.

Ball (1990) writes about ethnographic fieldwork and the particular problems which method poses for the novice researcher, neatly encapsulated in his title: Self-doubt and soft data. Whilst this research is not ethnographic, it is firmly in the qualitative domain. Ball warns that in ethnography, as the researcher is central to the research process, she cannot hide; neither during the data collection, nor in the subsequent presentation of findings. In speaking more generally on qualitative research, Ball is emphatic: 'we should not expect to read qualitative research without some idea of the instrument employed - the researcher herself or himself' (1990, p.170). For this reason, it is appropriate to offer some background for this particular research instrument, and I will do so in the following sections. Ball goes on to consider what

voice qualitative research should be written in, and concludes that it should always be in the first person. Whilst I understand his exhortation fully to own the research, I write in the first person when I feel the focus is legitimately on my own experience and developing expertise in research. However, I employ the more familiar third person when the focus should be on the experience of the guidance professionals under consideration.

1.2 Entry into the field of careers guidance

My entry into the guidance profession was preceded by a degree in French Literature, then a period of teaching overseas before joining a careers service as an employment officer, a member of the support staff. It was clear to me that without a professional qualification, I was of limited help to clients, and restricted in my own career progression. I was offered a traineeship with a large county careers service, and qualified as a careers officer after a one year full-time Polytechnic course followed by a probationary year, working as a supervised practitioner. This supervised year allowed me to build up my 'repertoire' of worked examples of guidance in action to use as a pool of experience on which to draw in future guidance practice with clients (Schön, 1987, p.271). Up to this point, my own experience of guidance as a client was minimal. The statutory provision of careers guidance for those leaving compulsory schooling was introduced with the 1973 legislation (see Figure 1, p.iv). Being part of the 1974 cohort resulted in the irony that although most of my professional life has been in the area of careers guidance, I myself did not have any entitlement to careers guidance during my statutory education, nor the A level programme which followed. As a final year undergraduate I again side-stepped careers guidance, albeit unintentionally, having secured employment before being called to the university careers service for the standard finalist's careers interview. At that time the adviser for all students in the Arts faculty held a doctoral degree in physics, and had an endearing respect for the linguists in her client group. She did not, however, have any formal training in

careers guidance: nor did any of her colleagues in that university careers service, right up until 1986.

1.3 Entry into the management of guidance professionals

From main grade work with school leavers I moved on to specialise with Post 16 clients, those entering, studying at or leaving sixth form or further education. Just over a year after completing my on-the-job training I moved into a management post, responsible for a team of professionals and support staff in an LEA careers service.

This move meant a better paid job, and was perceived as promotion, a perception I happily shared. Friedson comments on this paradox, that success in a profession often means moving away from the practice for which the professional has trained ‘true career success is gained by leaving one’s occupation to join the ranks of the management’ (1994, p.118). This was certainly the case in the careers service in question. The manager post had no official caseload of clients, although I did develop a roving brief to be on call when my colleagues wanted to confer on a difficult or problematic case. I was amazed that I had had to complete two years training to be fully qualified as a careers officer, but was expected to function as a manager with no preparation other than my own reflective practice. To ensure I had a theoretical framework on which to build my management practice, I enrolled on a part time Master’s course in guidance, choosing the management education pathway.

It became clear to me that the existing literature on management did not quite address the issues which, as a manager, I was facing daily. The public sector literature was starting to make sense of the changes brought in during the preceding decade (Ackroyd *et al*, 1989; Thomson, 1992 and Flynn, 1993) but did not explicitly address the provision of careers guidance, which had always straddled the Ministries of Employment and Education. Turning to the private sector literature (Peters and

Waterman, 1982; Peters, 1988) for ideas about anticipating quasi-private management of guidance provision did not help a great deal, predicated as it was mainly on private sector manufacture, and blissfully ignorant of the particular constraints that public service puts on strategic management. Nor did the literature on Total Quality Management illuminate management practice in public service. The sticking point in transferring practice derived in private sector manufacturing to public service is that while the former has the option of not buying the goods on offer, the latter may have no alternative supplier of choice. It was clear to me that for theory to be useful to the management of careers guidance delivery, it would help if it were derived from the study of careers guidance delivery. This conclusion shocked me, as much in its obviousness as in its novelty.

The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act required colleges to move out of local education authority control into independent corporate colleges. These reforms opened up new arenas in which careers guidance was called for. I left the careers service proper to join the senior management team of a newly incorporated Further Education college and set about my task of introducing a centralised admissions system. In this system, the professionals I managed had the authority to offer a place on any learning programme offered, with the exception of Art foundation. This gave me a very real chance to experience change management as a manager, in contrast with my previous experience of change that had been from the perspective of the ground level of service delivery. Hartley *et al* (1995) make the point that the management of change is often written about from the point of view of those who manage. They seek to implement change from the top down rather than from the ground up. Hartley *et al* (1995) present organisational change experienced as a set of overlapping levels. For me, this was a change of perspective from the bottom towards the top, and it became clear that there was a critical gap between strategic managers and service deliverers. The former responded to political decisions, but did not always successfully transfer understanding of that imperative to those

responsible for delivery; yet such understanding and commitment is necessary for effective change both in operational management and service delivery. There was a palpable tension between the call for autonomy on the part of the lecturers with a reluctance to shoulder the responsibility that such autonomy necessarily entailed. Whilst lecturers were vocal in demanding respect for their autonomy in teaching and learning, there was no such respect afforded to the professional autonomy of guidance workers. A rumbling protectionism underpinned the shock and dismay which lecturers expressed when confronted with the reality that other professionals had the power to make offers of places on the courses they ran, using entry criteria the lecturers themselves had drawn up with the express intention of widening access, in line with the recommendations of the Kennedy report into this sector (Kennedy, 1997). Edwards (1998) sees the need for a re-location of self-policing within the professional domain as pressing, and this was certainly borne out in the immediate maelstrom caused by the implementation of the FE reforms.

1.4 Making sense of the experience.

My new job in Further Education coincided with completing my Master's degree in Careers (Management Education) which required a cohesion and integration exercise in which I had to demonstrate my learning outcomes from the Master's programme. Some of the issues I had to think through then have informed my interest in developing research into careers guidance professionals. Before presenting these learning outcomes, it is useful to consider the theories of experiential learning which underpin the reflective process. Within their work with managers, Argyris and Schön (1975) had made a distinction between single loop and double loop learning. In single loop, the intention is to achieve a set objective, a clearly defined management goal. By staying cool and focused, managers were able to develop instrumental learning by which they could achieve the specified goal. Such learning did not, however, permit them to transfer an old solution to a new

problem; this required double loop learning, where critical reflection enabled the managers to develop a 'repertoire' (Schön, 1987, p.271) as opposed to a 'program', which allowed the freedom to construct new strategies in response to meanings.

Schön (1983, 1987) proposes two theories of action, which were developed in working on the professional development of managers. Espoused theory is used to explain or justify behaviour, often applied in retrospect. Theories-in-use on the other hand are tacit, implicit and found in spontaneous action. Mezirow *et al.* (1990) distinguish two broad ways of making meaning, which are both situated in learning. They identify 'meaning schemes' which are characteristically cause-effect and event sequences: predicated on past experience, we assume that action *a* will lead to outcome *b*. These meaning schemes are 'habitual' and offer 'rules for learning' (1990, p.2). Mezirow *et al.* develop a distinction between these meaning schemes and higher order schemata, the 'meaning perspectives'. While both meaning 'schemes' and meaning 'perspectives' offer a framework for understanding experience, the perspectives are not constricted. Rather than merely confirming experience, they can make sense of learning. Mezirow *et al.* (1990) see the dynamism between habit and interpretation is mediated by reflection, and make the point that reflecting, by which they means the practice of checking whether what has been learned previously is justified in the current circumstance, can be done unawares: 'Reflection also seems to refer to using beliefs to make an interpretation, to analyze, perform, discuss, or judge - however unaware one may be of doing so.' (1990, p.5). There is a distinction between thoughtful action, in which you use your wits while actively engaged (such as in playing chess) and reflective action, which uses 'a critical assessment of assumptions' (1990, p.6). Reflective action and thoughtful action are not seen as mutually exclusive, but may entwine and complement. Crucial to critical reflection is the time lapse needed to make meaning; 'critical reflection cannot become an integral element in the immediate action

process. It requires a hiatus in which to reassess one's meaning perspectives and, if necessary, to transform them' (1990, p.13).

Boud, Keogh and Walker (1989) offer a three-stage model of reflective learning:

- 1) Return to the experience to recapture as much detail as possible. This stage can be usefully written and or shared with others.
- 2) Attend to feelings attached to the experience and review them. Again, it is helpful to write or share.
- 3) Re-evaluate the experience.

Three components are to be found within each of the above stages:

- association; connecting ideas and feelings from experience to reflection with existing knowledge and experience;
- validation; examining ideas and feelings which are emergent between new and existing knowledge and beliefs, trying out new perceptions;
- appropriation; making new knowledge part of how we act and feel.

Analysis of my own learning experiences within this framework of experiential learning distilled personal learning outcomes from my management and guidance practice. This experiential learning took place during the period of time I was enrolled on the Master's course. The learning opportunities arose sometimes as a result of formal teaching and learning, for example when incorporating a newly encountered theory into my management approach. Equally, however, the learning was not formally structured at all, but came out of reflection on less conscious action both in work and home settings. Three occupational orientations are evident during my Master's registration. On entry, I was a careers guidance practitioner, newly appointed as a manager. During the study period, I became a manager of guidance professionals and support staff comprising a larger team within an FE college; a post which was part of the senior management team in a newly privatised organisation. My management education had been pivotal in securing this post, and was to prove

invaluable in executing the management function. On completion, I had just entered Higher Education on a temporary contract teaching on the initial professional qualification in careers guidance. My learning outcomes comprise three clusters:

- a) that careers guidance is powerful in allowing individuals to gain access to opportunities; such power commands responsibility on the part of the practitioner;
- b) that strategic management in public service is directly affected by political decisions, but as the impetus for change is not always communicated effectively, not all employees understand where the pressure to change comes from;
- c) that public service expects professional autonomy and professional discretion, but also requires evidence of direct correlation between input and outcome traced easily through audit.

These learning outcomes developed into the basis for further reflection and underpinned my continued research interest into the management of careers guidance professionals; such interest leading me inexorably to engaging in research myself.

1.5 Move into Higher Education

On completion of my Master's degree, I was successful in gaining employment as a lecturer at a new university, on the postgraduate course in careers guidance which comprises the initial professional qualification. In addition, I delivered the management teaching on the Masters' level course in careers guidance, which offers certificated continuing professional development. This brought me into contact not only with new entrants to the profession, but also experienced practitioners who returned for further study. Once the searchlight of public service reform in the quest for value for money illuminated the careers service, and legislation was passed which was intended to change the shape of guidance delivery, I was drawn into its

beam. For the implementation of my learning, Mezirow's hiatus (1990) was acutely important. In the temporal space between completing a Master's degree whilst working as a manager in a time of change in Further Education, and teaching management as part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Careers Guidance, it was powerful learning for me to return to some of the themes I had considered in practice, checking for assumptions in management education. In the light of my commitment both to careers guidance practice and the management of guidance, I decided to develop my research interest into this area to doctoral level. In the context of this research project, I deliberately constructed a hiatus in the data collection, leaving a gap of approximately one year between the initial data gathering with the Sample X questionnaire and the subsequent focus groups. This allowed the respondents to make sense of the 'old' changes in the light of current change. The temporal space allowed the making of meaning:

‘A perspective is transformed by the resolution of a dilemma through exposure to alternative perspectives and participation in critical discourse with other to verify one's new reality. Transformative learning is not a private affair involving information processing; it is interactive and intersubjective from start to finish.’ (Mezirow *et al.*, 1990, p.364)

If reflective learning is intended to change perspective, it cannot happen in isolation. Sharing the meaning made of experience is imperative. One function of this thesis is to engage in such dialogue.

1.6 Engaging in research

This thesis marks the end point of one stage on a journey of researcher development; a journey I intend to continue. This apprenticeship complements my two previous formal training courses, in careers guidance and in management. This third training permits me a voice in all three discourses Collin (2000, p.6) identifies as essential for careers guidance, namely academic, professional and managerial. I had

expected as a doctoral student to find out about research methodology and the community of research practice. What I had not expected to find was that reflective practice applies as much to research activity as to any other. I expected research to be neatly parametered, contained, tidy. I started out thinking research was something objective, positivist, out there; a legacy of my ignorance about the range of valid research method. What I found from reading about the range of method and the way the researcher chooses method appropriate to the research question (May, 1993; May, 1996) was that research is not run by some force out there, but by me, with all the responsibility that kind of autonomy implies. My experience is that it is messy, and everybody knows that it is messy, but only discloses this in private domains. The University of Queensland web pages for doctoral students blows the collective cover: 'sometimes, the linear nature of writing, masks a non-linear network of ideas.' (University of Queensland, 2000). Marshall and Rossman (1995) also argue that the process research can be messy even when it is presented as linear.

The few books I consulted on doctoral study were aimed at the student, but Murray (1996) writes on supervision for the supervisor, and neatly sums up the challenge faced: 'the art, for the supervisor, is in maintaining the focus on structure while creating space for the student to identify and reveal their issues.' (Murray, 1996, p.3). My experience of doctoral supervision was in some ways similar to the best kind of supervision I had sometimes enjoyed in my guidance practice. My supervisor, Alan Brown, gave me a safe space in which to voice my uncertainties. I was supported, but not directed; I was allowed to find my own way within the parameters of good practice.

For me this journey has been arduous and sometimes lonely. The University of Queensland website stresses that sustaining motivation is the key to successful completion, and advises the doctoral student to draw on 'a rich network of contacts: supervisor, fellow students, other academics, and of course, family and friends'

(University of Queensland, 2000). Reading a selection of doctoral theses (Jeffreys, 1984; Antonacopoulou, 1996; Matlay, 1996 and Shorthose 1996) gave insight into the journey of fellow students. Fellow academics in my university workplace have been surprisingly forthcoming about their own doctoral journey, volunteering that they had sometimes found the going tough. One fellow student in particular has been a great support to me, having faith in me even when my own faith wavered. My partner and children have been with me all the way, even when this work has diverted my attention away from them.

I have been sustained by the trust fellow careers professionals have put in me; those who took part in the data collection especially, but also those with whom I have shared the findings and the research process itself. The respondents in particular showed candour and good humour, resilience and a residual belief in careers guidance as something worthwhile. This shared belief in guidance is part of the professional identity of the community of practice in which I situate my work. There is a spectrum of practice within this community, and my position along this continuum is both at the teaching end of careers guidance and the careers guidance end of research; in this way, the work I have undertaken in this research, and on which I intend to build, enriches both the research and careers guidance communities.

SECTION 2

THE LITERATURE: RELATIONSHIPS AND CONTEXTS

2.1 Introduction to the literature

Blaxter *et al.* (1996, p.93) give no fewer than twenty reasons for reading as an essential part of any piece of research. These reasons range from the sublime ‘because it may cause you to change your mind’ to the ridiculous ‘It keeps you off the streets’, neither of which detracts from the underpinning rationale for reading other research. The literature search serves to show how my research fits with that which is already known. This research considers in some detail how careers practitioners have responded to a particular change in the way their work is organised. In asking practitioners what effect the privatisation of careers guidance delivery has had on their working lives, the answers frequently make reference to guidance: what guidance is; what guidance is intended for; whether or not the guidance they deliver is good; whether or not the guidance they deliver post-privatisation is the guidance they would have wished to deliver pre-privatisation. In order to make sense of what these practitioners are saying there needs to be an understanding of what guidance is, and what it means for them in their relations with clients, managers and those responsible for policy.

Edwards (1998, p.31), in considering professional development, lists three perspectives of guidance in which distinct discourses are discernible: user to practitioner; professional to manager and policy-maker to academic. Considering such relationships offers a way into the key questions above. At one level Edwards’

distinction between practitioner and professional would seem to be drawn along the accredited certificated training boundary. Within this research, all those practising were professionally qualified. That is to say, they had successfully completed a training course in careers guidance. Becher (1999) uses both ‘practitioner’ and ‘professional’ to refer to the members of professions he interviewed in his research. The principle underpinning this usage is that admission to a profession confers the right to practise, with the concomitant responsibility to practise ethically (Friedson, 1994; Cottone & Tarvydas, 1998; Becher, 1999). The use of ‘practitioner’ throughout this thesis is coterminous with ‘professional’.

Education and medicine are two of the long established professions joined by a wide range of occupations now considered professional (Hoyle & John, 1995). Warren Piper defines professional work as;

‘...complex: the practitioner has to respond to novel situations which he [*sic*] must analyse and categorise. Typically he [*sic*] will have to work with incomplete or inchoate information. This requires judgement. Crucial to this definition is that the practitioner calls upon a body of theoretical judgements (that is, they are based on more than personal experience) and is guided in his [*sic*] judgement by a set of ethics.’ (1992, p.150)

Guidance practitioners typically work alone with clients, making judgements about their situation given the information available within the interview. The practitioner draws on theory learnt in initial training and internalised through practice. These judgements are made in the context of a set of ethics, which the practitioner agrees to abide by either as a condition of service with their employing organisation, or as a member of the Institute of Career Guidance. By Warren Piper’s definition, guidance practitioners are professionals.

This research explores how some careers guidance practitioners have experienced the privatisation of service delivery. This experience is multi-faceted, and involves a series of relationships. The emphasis in this research is on what guidance means for the practitioners themselves. The impact on, and experience of guidance by other stakeholders, including managers and the clients themselves, is important only in relation to the experience of the careers guidance professional. Four distinct relationships are discernible: •Practitioner to Client; •Practitioner to Manager; •Practitioner to the Profession/Community of Practice and •Practitioner to Policy-maker.

Whereas the first three are direct relationships in which two-way communication is assumed and is, indeed in evidence, the final relationship, that between practitioner and policy-maker, is always mediated. That this relationship is mediated is not surprising, but there is no evidence in this research of practitioners having any sense of dialogue or exchange with policy-makers. Some practitioners draw attention to this non-relationship in terms of changes to policy which seem not to grasp the nature of what careers guidance is in practice.

2.1.1 Relationships and power

Joyce (1999, p.96) proposes a specific approach to the strategic management of public services. In this, he identifies that the critical success factor of effective leadership in public service is ‘to *empower* and include employees’. He goes on to describe relations within public service organisations explicitly in terms of power, and thus identifies a power paradigm, which operates as a three-way relationship between professionals, politicians and consumers. There is clarity about the power bases from which the first two players operate: the professionals exert expert power,

the politicians fiscal power. However, Joyce questions whether public service consumers can be said to hold any power at all. Given that professionals prize independent professional status, Joyce argues that the preferable management style is one of persuasion, of convincing the professionals by dint of a proven managerial track record. He develops his argument that where there is a powerful professional culture public service management needs a style of leadership ‘which wins consent and active support’ rather than one ‘which simply imposes a direction on the organisation’ (1999, p.101). Whilst the strength of the professional culture within this research is clearly demonstrable, the extent of that professional culture within the organisational culture is less certain. The importance lies in the set of three relations. Whereas Joyce (1999) sees them as being inextricably linked in a three-way interaction, the key relations for these careers practitioners operate simultaneously, both on a discrete, two-dimensional level and also as complex, multiple interactions. A taxonomy of relationships is discussed by Hartley, Cordingley and Benington (1995, p.16) in their work on change management in local government. By ‘pairing’ key players, they identify a set of four relations in the Local Authority context:

- Elected Members to Officers; •Corporate Manager to Service-Specific Managers;
- Strategic Managers to Operational Managers and •Managers to Professionals.

Although not directly applicable to a contracted-out careers guidance provider, this model nevertheless offers an analytical framework of paired relations, with all that implies in terms of interdependence, balance and tension. In the privatised careers companies, the elected members to officer relationship is now the board member to post-holder relationship, but that pairing remains, although it falls outside the scope of this investigation.

2.1.2 Values in relationships

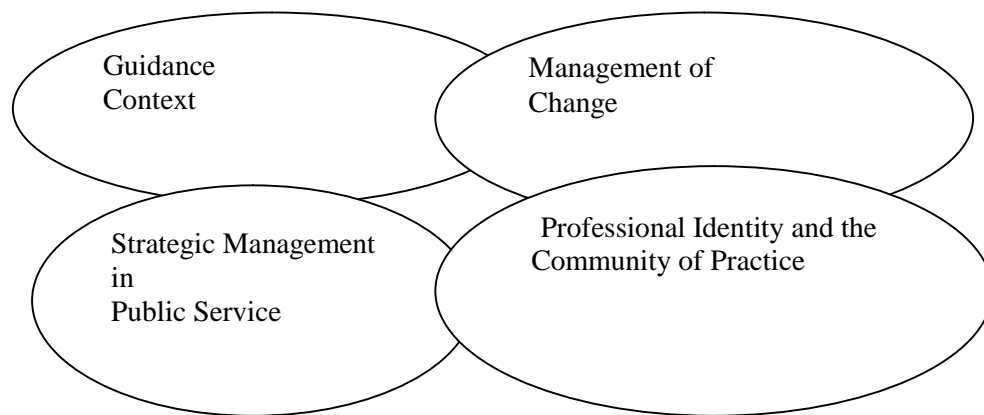
What is particularly useful about the Hartley *et al.* (1995) model is that they see these pairs as overlapping, so the tensions which exist inherently within the pairs are replicated across the pairings in a dynamic interplay. Within the specific services provided for education and social services, the central relationship is that between provider and recipient (1995, p.15) which mirrors the relationship between careers practitioner and client. Hartley *et al.* explicitly consider values within organisational culture arguing that it is possible to plot relations between key players along intersecting axes of values to identify areas of dissonance. Wallace *et al.* (1999) maintain that values lie at the heart of organisational culture, despite superficial debates about the distinction between culture and climate. These deep values may not be directly observable but are nonetheless discernible in the behaviours of employees (1999, p.552). Where the values of the individual employee coincide with the value sets prevalent at occupational, organisational and national level, there is value congruence. Where there is a misalliance at any level between the value sets of managers and the value sets of employees there will be a lack of value congruence, and the possibility of discomfort. Steadman *et al.* (1994, p.iii) also consider value conflict in organisations, identifying the source of the problem as ‘values expressed through accountable relationships internally within teams, departments and individuals and externally between an organisation and its various stakeholders.’ They go on to describe four overlapping sets, predicated on four value domains: legal; organisational; occupational and personal. This is useful in allowing employees to step out of the constraints of defining themselves solely in terms of professional identity, and allowing for a personal value set as distinct from

the shared occupational value set. In the context of this research with careers practitioners, the organisational value set equates to that of strategic management, which in turn embraces operational management. The legal value set aligns with the policy-maker. Again, the autonomous professional employed in public service can be situated in a set of values which are discernible as distinct in their own right, but shade from one to the other in their practical application at work.

2.1.3 The contextual landscape

The careers guidance practitioners in this research find themselves operating across a series of value sets, from personal to organisational by way of professional. There is no choice about which of these contexts to operate within at any given moment; one of the big issues for the guidance practitioner is that decisions have to be taken with real clients in real time against the background of multiple and sometimes competing contextual perspectives. The contexts overlap, the professional concern shading into the group concern, the group concern into the organisational concern, the organisational concern into the policy and back again in an inevitable link to the professional context of the guidance practitioner with the client. If relations are key to the work of professionals engaged in public service, it behoves the researcher to consider how practitioners relate in the contexts which have an impact on the debate. This section, the literature search, reflects the sets of relationships emanating from the guidance professional and sets them in the contexts of the debate. Drawing on the literature of these four contexts should help in making sense of how things are for guidance professionals in the wake of privatisation: see Figure 2.

Figure 2: the contexts for careers guidance professionals



Whilst these contexts are depicted here as merely overlapping, the actual interplay of these contexts is more complex; practitioners find themselves trying to make sense of multiple contexts and describe their inter-contextual navigation through conflict of interest.

2.1.4 Nomenclature

The practitioners refer to themselves variously as: careers officer, careers adviser, careers guidance adviser or careers consultants. These titles are indicative only of job designation within the organisation (Hannagan, 1995, p.302). ‘Careers officer’ was a designation commonly used from the inception of statutory careers guidance provision for school leavers, resulting from the 1973 Education Act (See Figure 1, p.iv). Watts (1991, p.230) explains the authority thus invested was distributed between the Local Education Authority whose concern was with careers service provision, and the Department of Education, which offered general guidance to the careers service and was responsible for the inspection arrangements. This bilateral arrangement satisfied both education and employment interests, as the Careers Service was provided by Local Education Authorities, delivered by those who held office, that is, the officers. The shift from ‘officer’ to ‘adviser’ was discernible

through the 1980s as services across the public sector sought to be perceived as less bureaucratic and more accessible to the customer. This shift in organisational culture came out of the pressure to be more accessible, more focused on the customer. In their work on quality assurance in welfare services, Pfeffer and Coote (1991) compare the private and public sectors:

‘the need to understand and respond to customers is no less urgent in health and social services than in the commercial world – in fact, it is more so. What is being assessed is far more complex: not merely what customers want, but what people need, and how far their needs are being met. Getting closer to the ‘customer’ is one way of learning how to be more responsive.’

(Pfeffer & Coote, 1991, p.44)

Subsequently, some careers companies designated this job Careers Consultant in a move to change cultural identity (Burnes, 1992, p.176) from Local Authority careers service to private sector careers company.

2.2 The Careers Practitioner to Client relationship in the guidance context

Collin (1997, p.436) and Watson (1994, p.358) agree that the main theories of careers guidance in the United Kingdom are the differentialist, the developmental, the behavioural and the structural. Kidd *et al.* (1994, p.386) conclude that the theorists who feature heavily in the training of careers practitioners are Holland (1966, 1973, 1985), Krumboltz (1979), Law (1981, 1996), Super (1957, 1990) and Roberts (1977, 1981, 1997). Most careers guidance theorists had a background in psychology and tended to focus on the individual, sometimes at the expense of the wider picture. From the inception of careers guidance in the early years of the twentieth century ‘matching’ of individuals and jobs was seen as the dominant paradigm. Careers guidance, as a distinct body of knowledge, came out of the work

done by psychologists into the domain of work and the relationships between work and psychological state (Sharf, 1997). Two distinct schools of thought, one from differential, the other from developmental psychology, emerged at much the same time. From differential psychology came the Trait and Factor or matching theories (Rodger, 1952; Holland, 1973 and Holland, 1985), although earlier origins are clear in Parsons (1908). The thinking underpinning this approach is that there is a 'fit' between the characteristics of a particular job or occupation, and the psychological traits and skill factors of the worker. If the job can be described by its constituent components, and the individual assessed in terms of the factors that the job demands, the worker will match the job. The better the fit between selected worker and chosen job, the better the psychological well being. Rodger's Personality Development Theory (1952) predicates occupational selection on individual difference and psychological need. The aim was to match common background across individuals to the chosen occupational classification. This was very much the rhetoric used in a handbook introducing the Youth Employment Service (YES) to the school leaver:

'Some people want a clean job in an office or a shop. Others, the more mechanically-minded, have lot of fun making things and getting machines to go... It all comes to this. Are you willing to take the first job that is offered and make the best of it, or are you determined to get the one that you think you could be happy in?' (Priestley and Phillips, 1958, p.4)

Holland (1973) also worked on a matching paradigm in his theory of types. Using a skill inventory, Holland sought to match the individual's interests to the type of work setting in which they would most comfortably fit. Holland's work was particularly timely in that his ideas and concepts were embedded in careers education and guidance following the introduction of statutory provision of careers guidance to school leavers. Super (1957, 1990) widens the perspective to encompass the individual's environment in considering situational determinants within career decision-making. He argues that people develop through career stages from

explorations to maturation. This developmental process culminates in realistic career decision-making. By incorporating a number of non-work roles in his developmental theory, Super addressed the main criticism of developmental theory, that it assumes the kind of career progression previously associated with the white, middle class male in western society. Although these modifications widened his thesis, Super's view is still restricted to the individual's field of vision, rather than the panorama of wider society.

The matching theorists have in common a rational or positivist approach. Their assumption is that the essentials of both work and worker can be classified then aligned so that the worker matches the work; a square peg fits into a square hole. A further assumption is that the individual will make a 'technically rational' decision, an assumption challenged by later writers such as Hodkinson *et al.* (1996). Kidd (1998) points to a deficiency she has identified in the technical-rational school of career choice. The neglect of explicit consideration of emotion in the career decision-making process is noticeable as an 'absent presence' (Kidd, 1998, p.275). Whilst acknowledging that some work has been done in this regard, she makes the general point that for the most part, the development of career theory has not addressed how people feel their way through the decision-making process: 'Until recently, theories of occupational choice and career development were largely driven by the assumption of rationality in behavior [*sic*] at work' (1998, p.275).

Kelly (1955) also wrote out of a psychology base, but sought to emphasise the individual rather than the match. His Personal Construct Theory posits that for any person, any event is open to several interpretations. The way a person makes sense of their experience of continual events creates a pattern or paradigm; the repetition and development of making meaning from experience is built up or constructed over time.

Whilst constructivism considers the interactions between an individual and their surroundings, particularly the meaning constructed by the individual, the social cognitivist explores the space between an individual and their environment in which learning takes place. Bandura (1997) writing from the social cognitive school, considers the concept of self-efficacy. At its simplest, self-efficacy occurs when self-belief is sufficient to motivate and achieve; if an individual believes a particular career goal is possible, the strength of that belief can sustain the achievement of that goal. Thus a career idea becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Peavy (1997) works directly with the perceptions which individual clients construct, to the extent of questioning the importance of occupation and work within the careers guidance interview. Whilst acknowledging that work and occupation are important, Peavy maintains that the main focus within careers guidance should be to enable the client to make meaning of experience. This explication (*sic*) of life experience and social life takes precedence over the application of psychological and personality theorising, and language and meaning take precedence over behavioural change. The givens in Peavy's (1997) view of the human condition are uncertainty; non-linearity; indeterminacy and unpredictability: his world-as-flux hypothesis. It follows then that the counsellor to client relationship expects co-operation and multiple contributions from a variety of data sources.

If the Trait and Factor theorists were concerned with matching work and worker, and the Constructivists were concerned with understanding the worker in relation to the working world, what of the wider world the worker inhabits? Sociological approaches to careers guidance move from the acute focus on the individual to the panorama of society as a whole. In contrast with the preceding approach to careers guidance which acts regardless of the actual opportunity structure external to individual choice, Roberts (1981, 1997) argues for explicit consideration of how social class systems interact with career decisions. He contends that only the relatively privileged few are in a position to choose a career path, with the majority

simply finding their way into and through working life. Kidd (1998) also considers the legacy of emphasis on making the right decision, and condemns it as no longer serving the needs of clients. To assume that one decision about career direction is sufficient for a life-long career path is to ignore the now established pattern of careers as unpredictable, untenable: ‘ the emphasis on initial occupational choice in traditional career theories is now plainly inadequate, since careers of the future will be characterized by sequences of decisions and work-role transitions throughout life’ (1998, p.276). There is a recognition that careers theory is not perfect, nor is it static. For theory to be useful to both practitioner and client, it has to take account of the opportunities, and therefore the lack of opportunities available to clients in their particular context.

2.2.1 The intention of careers guidance

So far, the professional practitioners in this research have been referred to as experts in guidance. There is sometimes the notion implicit in guidance of being led, perhaps even being placed on a particular path, but the intention lies in the sense of guiding the client around unfamiliar terrain, helping them to get their bearings in order for them to choose a path which takes them in the direction they want. No matter what the theoretical basis which underpins their practice, and despite possible discrepancies which Collin (1996) identifies between espoused theory and theory in practice, when careers guidance professionals work, they attempt to work *with* clients because it is, as they see it, for the *benefit* of clients. Watts (1991, p.230) emphasises the client-centred practice of careers guidance, despite careers guidance provision being part of the public welfare system, and therefore answerable to the public purse rather than the private client. Bayles (1989) argues that a truly client-centred approach involves the client in the decision-making process. If the professional has a special obligation, given the inherent imbalance of power in terms of professional knowledge, to intend good for the client, so the client has a special

obligation to trust that the professional acts in their best interest. The professional relationship becomes a fiduciary relationship, in which client and professional trust each other. Bayles holds both client and professional equally and jointly responsible for effective practice.

2.2.2 Autonomy as guiding principle in helping professions

Allison and Ewens (1998, p.441) see dangers when professionals from one discipline are called to work collaboratively with fellow professionals from another discipline, then proceed on the assumption that both disciplines share common values in client interaction. They argue that the market reforms in both health and social provision during the 1980s have resulted in a much more client-led, needs-orientated service. This in turn means that greater attention must be paid to the autonomy of patients, in contrast to the paternalistic 'best-interest' approach (1998, p.449) often characteristic of doctors and other health care professionals. If the client is to be afforded greater autonomy, however, they argue that this must be accompanied by greater responsibility in their interactions with professionals, for example in the disclosure of all relevant information. This is important because in all the changes in funding mechanisms, and consequent changes in the organisations in which professionals practise, there is a clear focus on the client. The client here being the end user of the guidance service; the person (or group of people) with whom the professional interacts as distinct from the funding body that commissioned the service. Watts (1991, p.233) makes the point: 'in the end, the main concern of guidance is seen as being to enable individuals to take responsibility for their choices, in terms of what is in their own best interest'. Some practitioners in the data gathered make explicit reference to this ambiguity, but are clear that the client in front of them is the client they attend to.

2.2.3 Variation across contexts of guidance delivery

There are different contexts for the delivery of guidance; educational, vocational or careers (Sadler and Watts, 2000). The first two tend to be used in the specific context of guidance delivered in an educational establishment with the intention of choosing the most appropriate learning programme. Vocational guidance is more concerned with specific training. Careers guidance may be seen as a more holistic approach, readily encompassing education, vocational and employment decision-making, and attending to the interplay across these domains. Hirsh *et al.* (1998) examined the constructs of work used in career guidance. They explicitly use career rather than careers to distance themselves from what they consider to be an outmoded approach to guidance. They argue that a more appropriate approach, given the current challenges faced by the individual client in securing and maintaining employment, is career counselling or guidance with the implication of iteration in career decision-making, not the once and for all implication of careers choice. Whereas careers guidance has been seen as facilitating a client to make an informed choice of occupation, which gets the client's foot in the door, or on the bottom rung of the ladder, the first step on an upward path, career guidance implies a more open-ended, less certain path to be trodden. Watts & Kidd (2000, p.494) argue that career guidance is focused on helping individuals not to choose a career, but to construct it.

2.3 Practitioner to Manager relations: the public service strategy context

In examining the relationship between the careers practitioner and the manager, there needs to be some clarification about what constitutes a manager in this context. Across both samples, as will be discussed later, some respondents referred to themselves as player-manager. By this they meant they had some responsibility for fellow practitioners at operational level, but were still substantially engaged in practice. A clear distinction was drawn by respondents in Sample X, both in the questionnaire data and in the subsequent focus groups, between the manager at local

level, that is the office in which they were based, in contrast with the Head Office which sets the strategy for the company.

Strategic management is concerned with the overall direction of an organisation; it considers the bigger picture, the overarching vision or direction. Strategic management embraces the full range of managerial functions including finance, human resource and management information systems, but strives not to become so involved in the details of a particular aspect of management that the overall aim is lost: 'To cope with the vast variety and range of environmental outputs in the strategic decision process, managers have to operate within some simplified model of that environment. Essentially, managers reduce the "infinite" to a personally manageable frame of reference' (Johnson and Scholes, 1997, p.32).

It is important to be clear that management fulfils a vital role within any organisation; 'the managerial imperative to manipulate is, according to the rational view, intended to harness and direct resources in pursuit of objectives and therefore does not contain a negative connotation' (Martin, 1998, p.458). Martin goes on to argue that effective communication is a critical success factor for strategy implementation, as all employees need to feel included if they are successfully to implement the strategic vision. Joyce (1999, p.96) also emphasises the need to engage commitment from all staff in an organisation if strategy is to succeed; strategic leaders need to include and to empower employees.

There is a recognition that older models of corporate planning, which offered little or no flexibility in the face of changing circumstance are no longer appropriate for the dynamic, even volatile, current context (Joyce, 1999, p.130). The classical model of corporate strategy (Mintzberg & Quinn, 1992, Mintzberg, 1994; Johnson and Scholes, 1997) comprises an iterative process through three stages; analysis, option-generation and implementation. The underlying assumption is that only by constant review can the strategy be evaluated. The iterative process allows the strategist to

review, rethink and re-align resources if the goals are not being met. Allowing the assumption that strategy exists in all organisations, the question arises whether strategy exists in the same way in public service as it does in the private sector.

Joyce (1999) and Isaac-Henry *et al.* (1997) agree that public service is discernibly different: 'the dysfunctional consequences of recent management reforms in fact are highlighting again some of the virtues of the earlier public administration paradigm - not least the ethic of public service' (1997, p.306). Ackroyd *et al.* (1989) see the relationships in public service crossing two dimensions; from service provider to end user or client, and from service delivery to paymaster. It is important to understand that these relations don't always run in the same direction. Wall (1993) writing on NHS reforms also makes a clear distinction between public sector and private service, arguing that in the former the manager is the servant both of the public and the patient (p. 49). Ackroyd *et al.* (1989) suggest that public service is tailored to the needs of clients, as often those who are responsible for delivery are themselves drawn from the practitioner ranks. Their work however, predates a number of public service reforms, not least the legislation affecting the careers service privatisation.

Although Wall (1993, p.35) makes the important point that professionals have to differentiate between needs and demands, he argues that professional integrity within public services ensures that recommendations for delivery are based on perceived client need rather than underlying practitioner need. This integrity prevailed in the face of what Becher characterises as 'Thatcher's eleven year confrontation with the professions...directed at weakening professional bodies and practitioners' (Becher, 1999, p.13). Farrell and Morris see the 'shift from public administration to public management' having as a driver the 'distrust of public sector professionals and managers' which in turn is 'based on the premise that officials are budget maximizers and act rationally in seeking to promote their own interests' (Farrell and Morris, 1999, p.31). This public choice stance that professionals serve their own

interests rather than client/customer interest is also contested by Dixon *et al.*, (1998). Nevertheless, whether policy is driven by self-interest from the practitioner/managers or apparent disinterest from the management echelon, the dual responsibility to both paymaster and end user remains. This dual relationship can be seen as dichotomous, with the practitioner marooned on the isthmus between control and delivery. And as Wall argues (1993, p.43) there is no way out for those with the responsibility for controlling resource allocation; to make no choice in resource allocation is to abdicate managerial responsibility.

For Joyce (1999) strategic management blends ideas and vision including, for those in the public sector, the concept of public service with performance measurement and the use of targets. In order to be effective, strategy requires both these soft and hard elements of management practice. Joyce advocates an approach to strategic management which he calls backward mapping. Backward because he takes as the starting point not the wide canvass of policy or strategy but the desired outcome for the end-user or the desired change for the organisation. From this, he works backwards, identifying those objectives at the lowest level of the organisation that would be necessary in order to bring about the desired strategic change. At the end of the backward mapping he identifies the strategic vision which will translate policy into practice.

2.3.1 Rethinking Strategic planning in practice

The wisdom of planning company strategy by formula, and sticking to that corporate plan no matter what changes unfold in the internal and external environments has been widely criticised in the last two decades: 'it is of course an unwise organisation that insists on keeping to its plans in spite of changing circumstances....this does not invalidate the whole planning process, but does illustrate its dangers' (Hannagan, 1995, p.118). Ansoff (1994) also challenges the status quo of strategic planning, not

just the fixed formula of the classic five year plan of the corporate planners, but also the more fluid planners, arguing that even the flexible plan is no longer appropriate for 'the turbulent, unpredictable and rapidly changing environment of the 1990s' (1994, p.31).

The heart of the debate between Ansoff and Mintzberg is the balance between planning and flexibility. Mintzberg (1994) considers that the notion of flexible planning can be dismissed as an oxymoron, but Ansoff argues that strategic planning must take account of, and then respond to, the individual circumstances of the organisation within its particular environments: 'Different environmental challenges require different strategic responses and, as a consequence, different planning approaches' (1994, p.32). So even within the parameters of flexible strategic planning there is a need for flexibility in identifying a corporate approach that tries to reach sufficient stability for survival whilst leaving sufficient flexibility for a fast response when both organisation and environment are volatile. Flynn and Talbot (1996) however, argue that strategy within the public sector is much more of a political process, a process which requires a process of negotiation between key stakeholders. They further argue that the scope for strategic planning within local government is restricted because strategy is 'limited or dictated by central government departments' (1996, p.25). Another peculiarity in local government is that sometimes the need for strategic planning is itself a requirement of funding. In these circumstances, the very process of strategic planning is reduced to a response to external pressure, resulting in a strategy which can have greater form than content.

A final constraint on strategy in local government has been the use of relatively short-term contracts. The time span of the iteration from preparing for the tendering process, through the delivery of the successful contract to the anticipation of the end of the contract and the preparation for tendering is telescoped, resulting in a reactive rather than anticipatory approach to planning. Careers service provision has always

been in the public sector, and although the Trades Union Reform and Employment Rights Act or TURER (H.M. Government, 1993) required the contracting-out of this provision to private companies, the contracts agreed in this process are funded from the public purse, and are still firmly within public service provision. So, while the careers companies in which the professionals are employed are no longer part of local government, they are still managed by people steeped in local government culture, and currently working in a short-contract regime.

2.3.2 The professionalisation of management

Whilst some of the literature would seem to imply that managers and professionals are from two irreconcilable tribes, there are some writers on management (Thomas, 1993; Critten, 1998) who advocate the recognition of management practice as a professional activity in its own right. In the context of public service management, where managers are managing professional employees, and particularly in the UK context, where public service managers are often drawn from the pool of professional employees, this would allow a synthesis of professionalism and managerialism for the purpose of effective management. Thomas makes the claim for managers as ‘practical theorists’ who ‘improvise; not just making it up as we go along, but fit together knowledge to inform practice in fruitful and productive ways’ (1993, p.211).

2.3.3 Public sector ethos

O’Toole (1993, p.1) identifies three critical factors that define a distinctive ethos within the public sector:

‘First, and most important, it is about the setting aside of personal interests...working altruistically for the public good. Secondly, it is about working with *others*, collegially and anonymously, to promote that public good. Thirdly, it is about integrity in dealing with the many and diverse problems which need solving if the public good is to be promoted.’

Brereton and Temple (1999, p.456) however, question whether this universal public sector ethos really exists. They suggest that the recent general experience within public sector, in which employees have had to shift from preoccupation with altruism to concern with performance indicators and outputs, has imbued the past with the rosy glow of nostalgia for how we would have liked things to be in public sector; not necessarily the same thing as how they actually were.

Dixon *et al.* (1998) see the shift in public accountability from inputs and process to outcomes lying at the heart of managerialism. This shift, along with the emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness, requires public sector organisations to draw on private sector management practices. Such change will necessarily change 'a public agency's traditional ideas, norms and values' (Dixon *et al.*, 1998, pp.177-8) and the change process itself will meet 'almost inevitable' barriers. Watson refers to the 'strong anti-public sector message of the Thatcher years' (1999, p.6). Brereton and Temple (1999, p.456) dismiss as simplistic the 'tit for tat' debates across the public/private sector divide, which they characterise as 'venal and profit-driven private sector' on the one hand and 'private sector good, public sector bad' on the other. In the uncharted territory of public sector/private sector hybrids, they identify the need to forge a new value map; 'Such bodies, where both public and private values co-exist, are clearly under pressure to evolve a new ethos to inform their working practices' (Brereton and Temple, 1999, p.462). Watson agrees that pressure is on public service professionals to find a new way: 'Ethical standards, service quality and public accountability are all principles on which the public services in this country are founded and are now being tested in a more fluid and pragmatic environment' (Watson, 1999, p.6).

The danger within the public sector is that there can be a value collision between employees who expected to work within a public service set of values, but find themselves, through policy re-organisations, working in companies operating to a

quite different value system, one which is market-led. All organisations need to have a strategy, the means by which they hope to achieve their ends, irrespective of the ideology or value system, which drives the underlying vision of the enterprise. This over-arching vision can often more readily be accessed from the upper echelons of the organisation, sometimes to the exclusion of the majority of employees. Currie (2000, p.18) warns of the dangers of such exclusion, particularly in relation to the management of change: 'Strategic change should be recognised as emergent, as well as being solely deliberate, rational and top-down. Strategy as process not only reflects the views of executive management, but represents a set of pragmatic compromises between various stakeholders in the organisation'.

He also identifies a recurrent theme which emerged from research conducted on middle managers: 'any participation from middle managers centred on a debate about who was the customer in the National Health Service' (2000, p.19). This debate, about the ambiguity of the client served in public service, was also recurrent throughout the data gathered in this research. Respondents brought up the question of client identity: *'in my own, mind, client need (I mean by client the people with whom I carry out interviews, groupwork, etc.) is paramount'* (X28), and *'The need to tailor it [guidance; MRM note] to Government requirements rather than individuals'* (X52). That the respondents take care to identify who they mean by clients shows that they consider there is inherent awareness that the client in front of them is not the one paying for the service they offer.

Edwards (1998, p.33) identifies this blurred focus as potentially divisive in its polarisation of professional and managerial; 'the managerial discourses become focused on outcomes rather than inputs'. However, he challenges the assumption that output measurement is necessarily restrictive, developing an argument for viewing a focus on outcome as a potential liberation for the professional: 'in some ways this actually provides the possibility for a certain expansion of practitioner autonomy as

there is less concern with how things are done, as long as goals are achieved effectively and efficiently' (1998, p.33). This point is also made by one of the careers professionals in the second focus group, where she reflects:

'I don't know how things will work in the future, but I feel in the last few years we've actually been given quite a substantial degree of freedom in how we've organised our time so long as we meet the targets - that may be the product of the people who have been managing us.'

(Jackie, Focus group 2, p.9, emphasis added)

2.3.4 The tension between managerialism and professionalism

Edwards (1998, p.33) challenges the assumption that managerialism is growing at the expense of professionalism, by arguing that this kind of power struggle affords the professional the opportunity to relocate professionalism in a code of self-policing practice, where the right to practise autonomously assumes the responsibility to practise effectively. Friedson (1994) makes a number of important distinctions between how work is organised and how work is controlled. He identifies two of the defining characteristics of professional work as being self-employed and self-regulated. The model of the self-employed or independent professional is more prevalent in the United States, although there has been significant movement away from the single-handed practitioner in the United Kingdom. As organisations have grown more complex, there has been a move towards more bureaucratic arrangements for professional work, in which professionals have become employees rather than self-employed individuals within a loose association, with shared premises and other resources. This kind of development is more evident in the older established professions, notably so in the case of Law and Medicine, with the added impetus in Medicine of the establishment of a significant public sector provision making it more sensible for doctors, particularly in general practice, to group together. For careers guidance professionals, the status quo has been to be employed, and the aspiration to professional status came after patterns of work

organisation had been established. Friedson (1994, p.132) makes the point that bureaucracy is often the most efficient organisation of labour, and whilst being employed by organisations which are large, complex and hierarchical might feel restrictive, employment *per se* does not restrict the profession; 'when an occupation becomes fully professionalized, even if its work characteristically goes on in an organization, management can control the resources connected with the work, but cannot control most of what the workers do or how they do it' (Friedson, 1994, p.63). Seddon (1997) concedes that in terms of self-regulation, teachers (in Australia) do not conform to the classical professional conventions, but argues they demonstrate sufficient 'licensed autonomy' (1997, p.236) to be considered professional. She makes the point that the effect of New Right reforms, in regulating the work done and emphasising outcome over process, may simultaneously de-professionalise teaching and yet offer the possibility of reclaiming professional status in response to these attacks. Friedson (1994) aligns with Edwards (1998) and Isaac-Henry *et al* (1997) in contesting the prevailing view that managerialism is in the ascendancy over professionals by making two points. One, that the view of professional power as diminishing is counterbalanced by a view that professional power is enduring; the power cup may be viewed either as half empty or half full. The other point also relates to ways of perceiving the current situation, in placing current against future. Friedson argues that policy can be reversed. Just as the increase in professionalisation which has been in evidence up to this point has to some extent been challenged by managerialism, so managerialism may in turn give way to ascendant professionalism; trends are not necessarily linear.

2.3.5 Changes to the careers service

Writing in anticipation of the careers service reforms, Watts (1991) considered the impact of the 'New Right' on careers guidance policy. He identified an inherent tension between public policy and the professional role of guidance, exacerbated by the primary client clearly being the individual with whom the careers professional

works, yet the provision of guidance being seen as an instrument of public policy, part of public welfare provision (1991, p.230). Watts argues that there are practical and ethical reasons to trust the careers professional to work with the client in front of them as the primary client, not having to shape their interactions with this actual client to the design of the more powerful fee-paying client outside the careers guidance encounter. Watts draws a useful distinction within the function of guidance within the labour market: 'careers guidance needs to be viewed not as a direct *instrument* of public policy but more of a *lubricant* of such policies and the operations of the labour market' (p.233). The image of guidance as lubricant holds equally good for work with the individual client, where the principle underpinning the practice is that the onus is on the client, supported by the guidance professional, to take responsibility for career decision-making and implementation. Watts again:

'there are dangers that guidance services will be evaluated by the behavioural outcomes of the decisions taken by their clients - i.e. by their destinations. This is clearly at variance with the principle that it is the client who's responsible for the decision and for determining whether the decision meets his or her needs. Guidance services should be evaluated...in terms of learning outcomes.'

(Watts, 1991, p.243)

In the period following Watts' comments quoted above, the careers services were taken out of LEA control, the Departments of Education and of Employment were merged, and in 1997 Labour was elected to form a government (see Figure 1, p.iv).

There was no discernible change in the performance indicator management of public service, where targets comprise the main, if not sole instrument of performance. The Careers Services National Association (CSNA, 1999) responded to two policy documents proposed by New Labour; the Learning to Succeed White Paper (DfEE, 1999b), and the Bridging the Gap Advisory Document from the Social Exclusion Unit (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Their response to these policy proposals was

informed by careful consideration of the changes which had taken place within careers services as a result of the 1993 TURER legislation (H.M. Government, 1993). A clear criticism of output measuring is made:

‘There has been a preoccupation in recent years across the public sector with simple targets leading to league tables which purport to give valuable consumer information. In too many cases, and this is certainly true of careers services and Training and Enterprise Councils, counting what is measurable, not what is important, has been the norm. Simple targets or performance indicators often divert the organisation from its principal purpose, and may have unintended and damaging side effects.’

(CSNA, 1999, 3.34)

Having expressed this level of concern about the performance indicators used to measure work done by careers services against the core contract with the DfEE, the CSNA goes on to suggest a radical rethink of output measurement in order to use organisational energy for the core task, rather than for measuring: ‘the DfEE should therefore take a more sophisticated approach to the setting of contractual targets. The results may not lead to league tables, but they would at least ensure the energies of the organisation are directed towards the desired ends’ (CSNA, 1999, 3.35). Power (1997), in examining the audit process in the context of the New Public Management points out that this kind of audit trail has an enormous impact on the way in which the organisation is arranged to the extent that the effectiveness of the organisation is not so much verified by as constructed around the audit process itself; the audit tail wagging the public service dog. He goes on to challenge New Public Management claims to speak on behalf of taxpayers and citizens as the mythical reference points that give the New Public Management its whole purpose. A curious iteration, where the auditing of self-serving professionals itself becomes self-serving.

Watson *et al.* (1998) undertook an evaluation of the management of change in six careers companies which were contracted from April 1996; not in the pilot

(Pathfinder) phase but in the rollout of careers service privatisation. Overall, they found that the new careers companies had adopted a conservative strategy, where delivering to the core contract with the DfEE and avoiding risk comprised the sum total of the strategic vision. Innovation and creativity were constrained by the pressure to deliver targets, with non-core activities (that is, activity which fell beyond the scope of the core DfEE contract) limited by insufficient development capital for ventures with more than a minimal level of risk. There was further criticism levelled at these new careers companies, that of ineffective change management. There was a polarisation between staff and managers, with low morale discernible among delivery or operational staff, including the careers professionals. Strategy, such as it was, was neither explained nor embraced, leading to the conclusion that 'some careers advisers and assistants felt distanced from headquarters staff not involved in guidance delivery. This has had the effect of making them feel they had little involvement in decision-making' (Watson *et al.*, 1998, para. 323). What is meant by the management of change and how this might serve careers companies requires closer attention to this literature.

2.3.6 Managing changing

Bedeian (1980) asserted that in the management of change, there are four facets to be considered in the organisational change process: Role; Task; People and Technology. He argues that these four facets comprise the totality of change strategy, and, as such, are irreconcilably linked, each to all. It follows that any impact on one aspect of the organisation will inevitably have some impact to a greater or lesser extent on the other three. The scope of the impact will not be the same on all four, but discernible nonetheless. For this reason, the implementation of change must consider the likely impact of one facet of change on the others; it is not enough to assume that change can be contained within one sphere of strategic consideration. The obverse of the four-facet impact holds equally good, in that these can be used as points of entry, offering an oblique way into the change process; by

changing the technology for example you can, at one remove, change the people involved. Sommerville (1999) considered the impact of culture on the corporate or strategic effectiveness of careers service, and concluded that the introduction of new technology had an immediate and far-reaching effect. She warned of the danger of introducing technology without due consideration of the impact of such tools on the task, 'high-cost, rapidly changing technologies will leave the culture ambivalent between role and task' (Sommerville, 1999, p.13). This conclusion, that technology will have a knock-on effect on task even where that is not the desired effect of the change introduced, bears out the Bedeian principles of levers for change.

Jabri (1997) considers Golembiewski's typology of change (Golembiewski, 1989) and considers its implication for change management. Alpha or first-level change is characterised as smooth, linear and well ordered, in contrast with Gamma or second-level change, which is discontinuous, radical to the point of transformation and chaotic. Alpha change management is of little help when the context is relatively complex and the pace of change relatively fast. Jabri argues that Alpha change is of so little help that it is now somewhat outdated, and that Gamma change is what is needed. He offers the image of 'catching the wave' (1997, p.26) in Gamma change, where employees can be drawn into a dynamic change process, rather than being carried over a static change threshold, and advocates the use of myth in the management of change. Johnson and Scholes (1997) use myth as a landmark in terms of corporate culture, a point of orientation for employees to gauge how things are done round here. Jabri expounds on the myth as a tool for the management of change; 'myths can help both management educators and practising managers to reflect on their experiences of change and reduce the complexity with which change is encountered' (Jabri, 1997, p.22). His prescription for effective change within an organisation is to place the onus for change firmly on managers. He makes the suggestion that myth be used in conjunction with systems within an organisation, so

there is a pairing of the logical and tight, embodied in systems, with the loose and open, embodied in myth (p.26).

2.3.7 Change for careers companies

Lawrence (1992) identified likely resistance to the proposals for careers service reorganising, even before the legislation was passed. He defended this resistance as more than what Bedeian (1980) refers to as parochial self-interest, explaining that ‘the resistance to the proposed changes appeared to be motivated more by a genuine concern for vulnerable clients than simple professional inertia or calculated self-interest’ (Lawrence, 1992, p.271). Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) argue that change does not take place in a vacuum, nor does it take place in isolation, affecting a neatly delineated set of actors within a given situation. From the start, they argue for a full contextualisation of proposed changes, where time and space is given to allow the individual within an organisation (such as a school) or a system (such as secondary education) to make sense of what is happening, and to draw on the experience of others in that process of making sense; ‘it is necessary to reflect on and understand both one’s own situation and the situations of relevant others in order to plan or cope with change’ (p.xii). Fullan’s perspective on educational change holds good for careers practitioners; there needs to be contextualisation and reflection for careers practitioners to make sense of their changing situation. For those careers professionals working in schools the pressure to reach targets means that their relations with their schools are crucial. The data offer rich evidence of a heightened understanding, on the part of some teachers, of the constraints within which their careers colleagues are working, leading to extra help to ensure that targets are met in school. Fullan *et al.* (1991) also develop the theme of intensification, where it is not merely the scope of the change effected in schools, nor yet the pace of one set of changes after another. The intensification is the sense of increasing pressure, including tight control of curriculum, control of delivery, control of school-based management (p.7) but more than that, the pressure is closing in on the professionals

from every possible angle. It is the tightening of the ratchet, the apparent endlessness of the change process. That sense of unrelenting pressure was reported by some of the careers practitioners in the research.

2.3.8 Response to change

Currie (2000) addresses strategic management in the public services, and identifies the securing of strategic change as being the fundamental issue. Such change is a process which not only reflects the views of executive management, but also represents a set of pragmatic compromises between various stakeholders in the organisation (Currie, 2000, p.18). Both Currie (2000, p.18) and Moran and Brightman (2000, p.67) see the natural reaction to change being fear. Moran and Brightman warn that the legitimate fear of encountering hostility (which managers can reasonably expect to find) might encourage managers to shy away from dialogue yet dialogue is vital for shared understanding, particularly of 'what business the organisation is in and who is the customer of the business...a clear definition of shared purpose is required' (Moran & Brightman, p.73). They offer a useful insight into the effect of time delay between managers and employees in adjusting to change. There is a cycle of response to the introduction of change, which moves through four distinct phases: denying the change; moving towards admitting that change has to be dealt with; agreeing with the change and finally, solving the problems change has brought. Problems arise when those in one part of the organisation have moved through the cycle in front of others; the delay often permeates from the top of an organisation down through the hierarchical layers eventually to rest with operational and delivery staff. Managers then risk perceiving people lower down in the organisation as progressing more slowly through the change cycle than they did and attributing this slow pace to reluctance or resistance. Whereas the reality is that employees are moving through the transition with equal speed, but at a time lag. The danger is that the managerial perception of a slower

pace encourages them to push the change through regardless of the reaction lower down in the organisation.

Lawrence (1992) warned of the dangers in change so radical that it threatened to sweep aside all that has gone before, and sees the careers service reforms threatening to make careers advisers 'abandon the central tenets of their professional identity...to subvert the ethical foundation which gives careers officers their sense of purpose' (p.257). He expresses concerns about the proposals which imply a measure of manipulation of client's career choices to satisfy funding requirements, seeing this as ethically questionable; 'using guidance as a form of social control would be regarded by careers officers as a contravention of professional ethics' (p.264). His appraisal of the scope of careers service reforms is stark: 'Not even teachers have been threatened with such profound change that they could find themselves "legislated" out of existence. Though no one has positively suggested that all careers officers should be made redundant, their professional autonomy is under threat' (Lawrence, 1992, p.271). At least two of the respondents echoed Lawrence's concerns about security of employment under the contracted out regime: *'The implementation has created a climate of fear. "If targets are not met - jobs are on the line!" Need for confidence on part of management to accept overall trend towards targets in a year, not a monthly panic' (X31)* and: *'Continually thinking about targets! Whether a y.p. [young person] meets the criteria for an action plan. Have we reached targets? What if we don't....what happens? Told that if we don't reach the targets staff could lose their jobs' (X64).*

Lawrence's concerns seemed justified, his pessimistic tone echoed in the early appraisals of the initial proposals for the Connexions strategy announced by the DfEE in 1999 (DfEE, 1999b) and developed in subsequent publications. This strategy is intended to bring the New Labour commitment to joined-up thinking into the provision of those services available for young people aged between 13 and 19,

to give 'all young people access to the highest standard of education and training and give them the best possible support in the transition from adolescence to adulthood' (DfEE, 2000a). The aim is to streamline all the available services, including education, family, housing, careers, health, money, leisure, welfare, benefits, stress and drug counselling so they are accessible through a single delivery point. Such streamlining will involve statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and specialist private sector companies working together to ensure that every young person has access to a Personal Adviser (Hughes and Morgan, 2000).

The role and function of the Personal Adviser has major implications for careers service provision, and for the continued role for the careers adviser. Originally, the Connexions strategy was promoted as a social exclusion initiative, intended for those 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training. Subsequently, the emphasis became more inclusive, to the extent of the development of a Personal Adviser role within schools, reporting to the Head Teacher (DfEE, 2000b). For the careers professionals involved in this research, the early indicators from the Connexions policy were that more change was to come, change even more radical than the privatisation of the careers services. The refocusing which took place during the period of data gathering, particularly in the time between the questionnaire administration and the focus group interviews fed uncertainty about the exact role of careers guidance in the service, although the need for careers guidance was clearly demonstrable. There was initial uncertainty about the target group; having had to work very hard with schools to ensure targeted delivery of careers guidance, the careers advisers in the sample feared that pupils in education would not have any entitlement to careers guidance from the Personal Adviser.

There is still uncertainty about the qualifications for Personal Advisers and how existing specialist qualifications (in careers guidance for example) will be recognised. Whilst Watts was very measured in his consideration of the issues

inherent in the concept of the Personal Adviser role, he expressed concern at the then uncertainties about the service, concluding: 'Thoughtful implementation could lead to a significant enhancement of current provision; careless implementation could lead to a serious (and possibly unintended) erosion of such provision' (Watts, 1999b, p.5). The Chief Executive of the Connexions Service National Unit has recently sought to allay such fears; 'careers guidance rightly has an important place in Connexions. The trick is to make sure it is in the right proportions, of the right quality and proves its value in evaluation. I am sure none of that holds any terrors for you' (Weinstock, 2001, p.3).

2.3.9 Organisations and learning

Rhodes (1997) looks at the locus of control within an organisation, and concludes that the process of managing change assumes that power is located in the hands of relatively few within an organisation. This may lead to imbalance, and the possibility that power may be transferred from the actor who holds power to the actor who feels relatively powerless. Assuming that the process of change within an organisation affords the opportunity for learning at both the individual and the organisational level, he argues that learning within an organisation during a changing process is only legitimised by power held by the actors within the organisation. There is however, a complexity of perspective and voice within and across an organisation, which permits alternative interpretations and validations of events which occur and are experienced; such validations do not rely on the conferral of power to legitimise the learning, but rather permit the learning to be recognised through a narrative approach. Rhodes proposes a narrative approach to the researching of change in organisations; he advocates discursive understanding of what change means for the actors, irrespective of their power; 'organizational learning is not an observable phenomenon determined by some external model; it is encased in how people recount and interpret their organizational experiences' (1997, p.19). So learning from the experience of change can not be legitimised by those

with power on behalf of individuals within the organisation, but can be experienced and shared through a narrative approach to making meaning. There is a need within research on the management of change to allow actors, especially those who would consider themselves relatively powerless, to tell their story.

Moran & Brightman (2000) are clear that there is a resource implication in the successful management of change. They challenge a common assumption that employees resist change; 'it is not the change they are resisting; it is the fear of not being able to do something new' (2000, p.72). They emphasise the need for what they describe as a 'safety net' (p. 67) of training and skills development, arguing that only by allocating resources including time, space and skills development will people be able to learn what is needed for the new. A number of respondents in this research made reference to the lack of time given to staff training or permitted for staff learning; within the focus groups the introduction of new equipment and procedures without any supporting training or development was brought up time and again. The issue of learning is important at three levels; for the individual, for the organisation and for the profession as a whole. At the organisational level, Senge's concept of the learning organisation is 'where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together' (Senge, 1990, p.4). This idea seems very far removed from the experience of these careers professionals. Given the realities of a target-driven context, where practitioners are feeling under pressure to achieve targets which they find stretching at best, it is not surprising to find a move towards routinisation and short-term thinking even in dealing with complex work (Eraut, 2000). There is no simple answer to organisational learning. Ashton (1998) identifies one company being hampered in its move towards becoming a learning organisation, not through lack of commitment or belief in collective learning as a desired end, but a lack of skill in facilitating learning, and harmonising the varied

learning agendas held by individuals within the company as a whole. Moran & Brightman (2000) do warn against the danger of quick-fix development activities, as the evident lack of appropriate resourcing can lead to scepticism, even resentment. There is a great irony at the heart of this issue of learning. If competitive companies are built on innovation and the development of knowledge capital in order to stay ahead of the competition (Leavy, 1998; Pettigrew & Whipp, 1991), if complex tasks in volatile environments demand new ways of thinking and practising (Senge, 1990; Engeström *et al*, 1995) and a defining characteristic of professionalism is the commitment to continuing professional development (Friedson, 1994; Watkins & Drury, 1994; Watkins *et al* 1996; Becher 1999, ICG, 1999), why do professionals in the sample feel that their access to time and space for learning has been squeezed out now they are employed in privatised companies?

2.3.10 Psychological Contract

The management of change often implies some explicit change to work or work practices; a management action which may be either proactive or reactive, anticipating or responding to some trigger for change either within the internal or external environment. There is another arena in which change can have far-reaching effect, and that is in relation to the psychological contract between organisation and employee. The concept of a psychological contract was introduced by Argyris (1960) in his work on organisations. His premise is that in addition to the explicit written contract of employment which sets out what the employer will give to the employee in terms of his or her labour, there is a implicit contract of employment which addresses the psychological exchange inherent within the employment relationship. This implicit psychological relationship is discernible but not necessary demonstrable. There is some notion of negotiation within the contract, with the intention of securing a match between what the employer is offering and what the employee is seeking. However, neither the process of negotiation nor the eventual outcome are recorded formally; and where an agreement is understood, there is the

danger of misunderstanding. Herriot (1992) considers the possible consequences of a violation of the psychological contract, but distinguishes between two distinct types of psychological contract. A relational contract is where the financial contract is imbued with an emotional element, whereas a transactional contract is one-dimensional, attending only to the financial exchange. Where the psychological contract is emotional, violation leads to strong emotions of anger, grief and mistrust. Violation, or perceived violation of a relational contract leads to subsequent re-negotiation of the contract to a transactional one.

2.3.11 Emotional labour

Hochschild (1983) proposed the notion of emotional labour in her work on flight attendants in the United States. In this, she advances the idea that in the exchange of labour for money, the employment contract comprises not only physical and mental labour, but also emotional labour, where employees are required to 'induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (p.7). Whilst her initial work drew on one occupational area, flight attendants, she concludes that emotional labour is implicit in a number of jobs (p.148) which would, arguably, include that of careers professional. Her premise is that 'there is a cost to emotional work: it affects the degree to which we listen to feeling and sometimes our very capacity to feel' (p.21). She identifies a process in which this cost of emotional labour to the employee becomes manifest. Initially, the employee identifies wholeheartedly with the work, taking on the value system promulgated by the company. Next, the employee distinguishes between their employed persona, the 'actor', and their natural state of being, the 'self' (p.187). Finally, the employee becomes aware of the distinction between the two personae of actor and self, which leads to cynicism. The employers are aware of this three stage process; whereas the initial training given to flight attendants concentrates on how the passenger is feeling and attends to their demands and needs, subsequent training for flight attendants focuses on how the attendants feel (p.113) and responds to their

needs. The company is therefore aware of the effect of emotional labour on their employees.

John (2000) develops this concept of emotional labour in the context of becoming a professional. He identifies emotional work being undertaken in medicine and social work, and argues that professionals who are working in these two fields have to do emotional work and also to demonstrate emotional sensitivity. This double demand can be at a cost to the professional involved. John goes on to identify that the combination of emotional work with an imposed policy agenda can result in 'negative emotions - frustration, anger and guilt' (John, 2000, p.6). He identifies the tension between professional values and policy values 'often the values of professionals are bound up with the wider purposes of the profession. In this sense, the policy initiatives and the effects of government proclamations too often de-values the work of the professional' (p.13). Where such tension exists, it would appear that policy affects professionals in a much more real way than if no emotional work were involved in the organisation or the employment. Warnock (1998) challenges the notion that ethical dilemmas are resolved in some sort of emotional vacuum, by a disinterested professional, arguing that 'the subject matter of ethics demands that one becomes emotionally as well as theoretically and philosophically committed to one's beliefs' (Warnock, 1998, p.107). Farber (1983) writing on human service professionals, challenges the public perception that 'professionals experience a high level of autonomy accompanied by relatively little tedium in their lives' (p.8). He contrasts this perception with the very different experience of human service professionals working in the public sector, engaged in medical, paramedical and social or helping professions. In these circumstances, workers are less likely to enjoy the autonomy they expected to come along with the right to practise and 'the loss of autonomy, particularly in goal setting, is discouraging' (Farber, 1983, p.35.) Going on to consider the effect of target setting, threats to autonomy and other management practices which respond to policy, Farber asserts that 'the effects of

stress on professional workers can take an almost infinite variety of forms' (p.243). Kidd (1998, p.283) concludes that emotional labour clearly applies to the work undertaken by career counsellors, and asks what this means for the individual employees; how do they cope with displaying or even feeling a particular set of required emotions. What ethical questions does this raise about the client expectation of emotional display or feeling, and what in turn, is the effect on the careers professional.

2.3.12 Changing management practice

Critten (1998) sees the impact of widespread change in numerous organisations acting in turn as an external trigger for change both to the practice of management and to management education. He argues that the main shift should be in the self-perception of managers towards professional practice. That is to say, managers should move towards a practice of management which itself satisfies the criteria generally applied to professional work. The Monopolies Commission offered seven criteria that comprised the defining characteristics of a profession:

- 1) Practitioners apply a specialist skill enabling them to offer a specialized service;
- 2) The skill has been acquired by intellectual and practical training in a well-defined area of study;
- 3) The service calls for a high degree of detachment and integrity on the part of the practitioner in exercising his [*sic*] personal judgement on behalf of his [*sic*] client;
- 4) The service involves direct, personal and fiduciary relations with the client;
- 5) The practitioners collectively have a particular sense of responsibility for maintaining the competence and integrity of the occupation as a whole;
- 6) The practitioners tend to or are required to avoid certain methods of attracting business;

7) The practitioners are organised in bodies which, with or without state intervention, are concerned to provide machinery for testing competence and regulating standards of competence and conduct.

(Monopolies Commission, 1970)

There is a somewhat dated feel to this list, the least of which is the inferred gender bias inherent in the elegant use of the masculine to embrace the feminine in criterion three. The restrictions on advertising have been somewhat relaxed if not altogether removed, although considered a contentious move in some of the older professions, such as Law (Becher, 1999). The assumption that relations with the client are direct and personal does not allow for the current realities of asynchronous and distant interactions now possible thanks to advances in information communication technology (Oravec, 1996; Bloom, 1998), nor does it adequately reflect the realities of public service provision which is enjoyed by the user free, or subsidised, at the point of delivery. These are not fundamental issues which would challenge the basic principles, but reminders of how the world has changed in the intervening years and is poised to change still further.

Critten (1998) argues that managing change in the current climate has reached a point of complexity, diversity and pace that the management challenge is no longer merely to manage change but to manage change at the point of chaos: 'The central problem for managers brought up on a recipe of control is what you do when you're told that it is an illusion to believe you can 'control' anything in organisations which are by definition at the edge of chaos' (1998, p.3). His advice for managers is not to be so hands on, but to step back and reflect; not to do, but to be. He advocates the use of reflection to build up knowledge in order to manage at the edge of chaos; in order to deal with the complex and unfamiliar, the manager needs to develop the professional's repertoire on which to draw to deal with the novel and unfamiliar situation. Other professional occupations, notably health (Fish, 1991) and social work (Winter, 1989, 1991), have made conscious attempts to ensure that

professionals reflect on their working practices (Kolb, 1984). The intended outcome of such reflection is to create a virtuous circle, where the learning outcomes from an individual's reflection on their practice can inform future action, which in turn leads to further learning and a further iteration of the reflective learning cycle.

2.3.13 Public service reforms under Labour

Thomson (1992) surveyed public sector management between 1979 and 1992, a period she characterised as being one of radical change. In this she offers a useful perspective on the public sector, in that some of the characteristics which now seem no more than the status quo, such as privatisation itself, deregulation and competition, were presented and experienced as revolutionary at the time of introduction. Apart from the value of such a perspective, Thomson is also interesting in predicting in 1992, how things might turn out for the future of public service, which she argues will retain a tight focus on the customer irrespective of the political persuasion of the policy-makers; 'service quality and customer care are likely to be of continuing significance for the management in public sector for the foreseeable future since the focus is shared by all three political parties' (1992, p.37). Early in their administration, Labour identified five key commitments on which their approach to policy in public services would be based, outlined in the White Paper, *Modernising Government* (The Cabinet Office, 1999). These included being responsive, offering a quality public service and making greater use of information communication technology. The final commitment, however, is the most telling in the context of the effect of public sector reforms on public service employees. In this, the Government asserts that it will value public service, not denigrate it. This contrasts starkly with Flynn's assessment of the public sector reforms under the Thatcher administrations which 'denigrated professionals' (1993, p.17) and depicted teachers as 'feckless and lazy' (1993, p.17).

Farell and Morris (1999) looked at the headteachers, and social workers' perception of bureaucratic change. They found that the reforms in public sector had been intended to reduce bureaucracy and to increase efficiency, but also to undermine professionals engaged in public service. There was a discrepancy between the promise of more local decision-making in the introduction of the reforms and the outcome, which has been to increase centralised control. They identified tension between management and delivery for those professionals who had moved into a management role. Despite the increase in bureaucracy, professionals have been able to maintain a distinctive public service ethos. Gerwartz *et al.* (1993) however, found that this ethos was severely tested in one secondary school which, because of its history, reputation and location, 'is a school fighting for survival. If it ignores the market, it dies' (p.236). The tension as the inclusive, caring culture of the school is brought into conflict with the selective, profit-orientated culture of the market place means that professionals in the school are 'reluctantly implicated' in the market place, that is to say 'they do not like it, but they are part of it, and most recognise a need to respond to it' (1993, p.239). Gerwartz *et al.* are very clear that these policy reforms are 'not a neutral mechanism of resource allocation, nor is it apolitical; it is a form of ordered competition, with *particular* social and economic goals embedded in it' (1993, p.250).

McLeod and Machin also warn that ignoring policy is not a realistic option. They acknowledge that dealing with policy implementations and the implications of policy is not an easy task, but one which must be grasped effectively if the organisation delivering the public service is to continue to do so; 'a constant struggle to demonstrate their moral and practical legitimacy, in order to justify their funding either from government (local or national) or charitable sources' (McLeod & Machin, 1998, p.333).

2.3.14 The professionalist: managerialist paradigm

Randle and Brady (1997) conducted research in Further Education to examine the impact of the 1992 Higher and Further Education Act (DfE, 1993a) which required all Further Education Colleges to come out of Local Education Authority control and function as independent or Incorporated Colleges, providing educational services as agreed in a direct contract with the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Their research focus (Randle & Brady, 1997, p.125) was on how the new management style had had an impact upon professional autonomy. They conclude that the problems experienced by teaching staff in the Further Education college in question stem not only from the management of change, but also from tensions which arise between managers on the one hand and professionals on the other.

In this particular college the management stratum did not share the professional training of staff (Randle & Brady, 1997, p.135) which gave rise to two separate and conflicting paradigms being used simultaneously by two groups. One is the management paradigm, which is concerned with running the college as a successful business. This entails ensuring demonstrable quality to satisfy contract requirements and therefore generate income by achieving the outputs required by the FEFC contract. The underpinning assumption in the managerial paradigm is that only if funds are secured will there be any future for further education. This contrasts, indeed conflicts, with the professional paradigm, which values the intangible process of education as much as the demonstrable outputs from a specified learning programme. Furthermore, the professional paradigm sees quality as some measure of superiority or improvement rather than of contract compliance. Underpinning the professional paradigm is the assumption that the professional lecturer has always and will continue to act in the best interests of the student.

There are demonstrable parallels between lecturers working in incorporated Further Education colleges and careers guidance professionals working in the contracted-out

careers companies. Both are working in contexts which have drastically changed as a direct result of legislation. Both have moved from working in the public sector as part of the Local Education Authority into private organisations delivering a public service. Both rely heavily for income on one main contract with Government, if at arms-length from Central Government, and delivered by a centralised body or quango. Taking the elements which constitute the two paradigms and adjusting them slightly to reflect the context in which the careers practitioners are working establishes a framework for comparison which can point to likely areas of probable tension; see Figure 3:

Figure 3: professional - managerial paradigms

PROFESSIONAL PARADIGM

Goals and Values

Primacy of client experience

Loyalty to clients and colleagues

Concern for guidance process

Key Assumptions

Professionals hold expertise

Resources allocated to client need

Quality of provision assessed on basis of
client experience of guidance process

MANAGERIAL PARADIGM

Goals and Values

Primacy of output for income

Loyalty to organisation

Concern for efficiency/value for money

Key Assumptions

Professionals deliver outputs

Resources allocated by policy

Quality assured on basis of
output

PROFESSIONAL PARADIGM

Ethos

Guidance community and collegiality

Beneficence

Accountable to peers

Principles of trust and autonomy

Professional responsibility

Diversity of service and professionals

MANAGERIAL PARADIGM

Ethos

Competitive market position

Non-maleficence

Accountable to management

Tracking and performance indicators

Managerial responsibility

Uniformity of service delivery

These parallel paradigms are useful primarily in making sense of what is happening in a public service delivery organisation. That the two paradigms are discernible at the same time in the same organisation is not necessarily problematic; analysis of organisational culture is likely to find a number of groups or groupings within the same corporate setting (Johnson & Scholes, 1997). The parallel paradigms are a source of corporate concern when there is no bridge from one to the other; when the two paradigms are working in parallel within the organisation, or where there is evidence of increasing distance between the two, a drifting apart between manager and professional.

2.3.15 Lack of voice

Gleeson and Shain (1999) claim, in their work, to redress the lack of lecturer voice in research on the effect of privatisation in Further Education. They identify the issue of estrangement within an FE college where the senior staff can be identified within the organisation as moving towards strategy and therefore away from the professional teaching staff within the college. The professional/managerial dichotomy is predicated on the introduction of a target culture and the marketisation of education (1999, p.464) giving rise to the paradox that the reforms which promised a free market within the public sector in general and further education in

particular, have resulted in careful central control. They see age, length in post and previous work experience to be significant variables in the way in which lecturers feel their way through the privatisation process, and identify the erosion of lecturer autonomy as having led to disenchantment (Gleeson and Shain, 1999, p.480). They conclude that 'the dominant managerialist discourse that emphasises loyalty to organisations above collegiality, competence over knowledge, compliance over judgement and outcome over process' (1999, p.488), now contrasts with the professional, pedagogical discourse which had been dominant before the privatisation of further education.

It is evident from the existing literature that reforms in public sector delivery of professional services have had the most marked effect on the professional responsible for service delivery to the end-users. There would, however, seem to be a lack of voice afforded to the experience of such professionals who find themselves under pressure as a result of policy.

2.4 The Practitioner to policy relationship

In considering the relationship between the careers practitioner and policy, it is necessary to chart the background to the legislation which changed the mechanism for delivery of statutory careers guidance.

In the wave of reforms that characterised the experience of the public sector through the 1980s, the Careers Service managed to keep its feet dry. Sheltered in the backwaters of Local Education Authorities, with no great political clout (given that the biggest client group was the statutory school leaver) a voteless, voiceless creature which had no very obvious impact on the economy, it was business very much as usual from its formalisation as Careers Service in 1973 until the radical shake up of the Trades Union Reform and Employment Rights Act (DfEE, 1993b).

This is not to overlook the unease with which careers officers viewed their growing involvement in the programmes set up under the Thatcher administration to address youth unemployment, notably the Youth Opportunities Scheme and the Youth Training Scheme. As Watts (1991, p.238) comments, careers officers saw the pressure to act as a recruitment agency for YOP/YTS in conflict with Government guidelines that the main consideration be the best interests of the young people concerned. Nevertheless, the organisation of careers services was recognisable from its inception until the introduction of the 1993 legislation. In order to understand the impact of this legislation, it is necessary to track back to the factors that forced radical changes throughout the UK public sector during that period.

By 1977 inflation in Great Britain was higher than any national competitor except Italy (Thomson, 1981; Obelkevich, 1994). Compounded by a stagnant economy, this created 'stagflation.' When, in October 1976, the International Monetary Fund agreed to loan money to Britain it was on specific condition that the public sector borrowing requirement be reduced. The Labour government translated this into an attempt to reduce spending on public sector workers. The government of the day, irrespective of ideology, would have had to meet this requirement: the Conservative government elected in 1979 under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher not only embraced these conditions, but extolled their virtue: 'The Conservatives attacked the Government's record on inflation and called for public expenditure cuts, and were duly returned to power' (Thomson, 1981, p.337). From this point, with increasing rigour, the professional working in the public sector was under scrutiny.

The principles of the new administration were the so-called 3 e's: economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Flynn, 1993). In order to gauge professional performance against these principles, various instruments of measurement such as performance indicators and outcome related funding were introduced. In the area of education, the Education Reform Act of 1988 was very prescriptive. It laid out in

detail both the national curriculum that was to be delivered in public sector schools and the total hours teachers were to spend on different activities, including administration and continuing professional development. The current debate about curriculum standardisation within Higher Education may well draw on the experience of school teachers. Warren Piper (1992) writing about proposals to standardise curriculum content at undergraduate level, draws on the experience of the secondary school teaching profession, and maintains that prescribing what is taught and how it is taught undermines what he calls the professional-ness of teaching. The content of the national curriculum has subsequently been amended several times, as has the methodology for comparing schools' performance on the basis of pupils' attainment in standard tests at the 4 key stages of compulsory schooling. The publication of so-called league tables followed, and now extends across a range of public services. These league tables can include a diversity of indicators, from the reading and writing of 7 year olds in schools to the extent of flu vaccination for the over 70's. The very term public sector is now widely supplanted by the use of public service. This usually implies that the service is still free at the point of delivery, although some services require the client to pay a proportion of the cost, which is reduced in specific individual circumstances (Parsons, 1995).

An important part of these fundamental changes to the cultural web of public services, concerns the use of more directive approaches as a way of managing the professionals. Ackroyd *et al.* present this as a particular issue for public sector professionals in Britain where 'the activities of public sector workers... shape the concerns of public sector managers...especially in Britain where managers are recruited almost exclusively from among practitioners' (1989, p.606). Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the National Health Service, most acutely in hospitals, but also in general practice. In the main, hospitals had been run by qualified doctors who decreased their clinical practice as they assumed more managerial responsibility. Their decision-making as managers was highly

influenced by their clinical training, in that their ethics and value systems were those of the medical profession. The role of the administrator in the old public sector was to secure the resources required by the professional. The requirement in the new public sector to prove that these resources really are essential by providing evidence of outcome rather than asserting professional judgement. In the new world of the 3es, the administrator assumes the management function, and with it the right, indeed the responsibility, to question the professional's assertion that resources were needed. In writing about National Health Service reforms, Marwick identifies: 'the main actual developments took the form of introducing outside managerial skills into the NHS' (Marwick, 1996, p.355). Henry (1995, p.21) warns of dangers where as a result of output measurement the: 'psychological change in the mind of the manager shifts from people to the provision of contracted units of care'. In considering the difference between management theory derived in private sector when then applied to public service, Currie (2000) reports; 'in particular, middle managers felt that ethical and clinical dimensions of health care were not considered in generic marketing models' (p.19). This lack of such consideration derives not from any dereliction of duty, but presumably from a lack of a shared ethical code across marketing and medicine.

2.4.1 The emergence of a new type of public service management

Thomson (1992) argues that two assumptions governed policy from 1979 - 1992. The first was that the discipline of the market place would prevail in prudent public service management, and the second was 'the perceived failure of collectivism or corporatism' (1992, p.33). The Conservative administration of 1979 was committed to the discipline of the market, and that commitment continued to drive its policies, both towards the economy as a whole and towards the management of the public sector. These reforms were categorised as: Privatisation, Deregulation, Delegation, Competition, Enterprise and Service Quality. A recurrent and important reform is the creation of a purchaser/provider split. This device is predicated on the principle that

an understanding of hidden costs across and within public sector organisations has to be made explicit in order to be scrutinised for value for money. The other major shift was to redefine the relationship between professional and client.

The relationship between public service professional and client is always ambiguous, in that the client with whom the professional consultation takes place rarely pays for the service, may not indeed even have any real say in how the service provision is designed. Whilst tax-payers pay the piper, they may not always feel that they call the tune. If the initial reforms, which had an immediate and lasting impact are broadly speaking Thatcherite, the Charter movement of the early 90's was closely associated with, and certainly owned by, John Major, then Prime Minister (Major, 1991). The introduction of the Citizens' and Students' Charter among others was a Government initiative to encourage the client or customer to question, even to challenge the actions and judgements of public service professionals. Nomenclature is here significant, not just in that it marks a superficial shift, but in that it invites the user of the service to have a say in what that service is or should be, and how it should be delivered. Eraut (1994, p.5) acknowledges 'the concept of service was profession centred rather than client centred' and the charge of complacency and self-serving can be levelled against both individuals and professions.

Brereton and Temple (1999) argue that the public at large has not really understood the impact of privatisation on public services. They consider it inevitable that a privatised, profit-driven service will be different, and yet there was not a clear understanding of the potential disadvantages to the end user of those kind of differences. They argue the need to devise an appropriate set of values to govern the new hybrid public/private service providers. They also argue explicitly in ethical terms that the new culture of governance has shifted 'from process to end product, and from a professionally self-referencing definition of efficiency and effectiveness to one defined in terms of outcomes' (Brereton and Temple, 1999, p.471).

There are dangers too, however, in assuming to represent the end user of the service, be they client or customer, without disentangling the political agenda of stakeholding. McKevitt and Lawton (1996, p.53) in their work with public service managers undergoing Master of Business Administration courses identified the familiar issue that: 'of course, it is not always clear who is the customer or client for public services'. They also found clear agreement from these managers, across the board in public service, that top-down external forces, including legislation, were overwhelmingly the most important driving force behind performance measurement (1996, p.50). They found that there was limited evidence of the involvement of stakeholders, through open consultation, in the devising of appropriate performance measurements, except in the National Health Service, where professionals made a significant contribution to the performance criteria. They suggest (p.50) there might be some advantage in a loose coalition of stakeholder interests between producers and clients facing conditions of resource constraints, although they warn of the inherent danger in such a consultation; that stakeholders identify services that managers simply cannot deliver, given the limited resources available.

McKevitt and Lawton acknowledge that there is potential for tension, and destructive tension at that, in the polarisation within an organisation between the managerial imperative and the professional impetus: 'the pursuit of professional goals may lead to goal conflict within the organisation' (McKevitt & Lawton, 1996, p.52). They take the issue of such polarisation further, arguing for the recognition of the delicate complexity of such situations:

'However, it seems to us that to assume professional autonomy is necessarily dysfunctional for an organisation is too simplistic. Further work needs to be done concerning the extent to which professionals may further and protect the interest of another group of stakeholders, for example, patients or clients, against the wishes of a further group of stakeholders, for example, senior managers.'

(1996, p.52)

In this way, McKevitt and Lawton anticipate the complexity found by the careers guidance professionals in their work. The professional imperative to do the best you can for your client sits ill with the managerial imperative to do well enough for all your clients. The problem for the professional is not that there is some clear-cut choice between being a good adviser or a bad worker; the lived experience is trying to find a way through multiple pressures in real time with real people.

2.4.2 Called to account

Accountability is no bad thing and professionals who wish to make claims for the integrity and value of their profession have at some stage to address the question of self-regulation. Whilst exclusion from a given profession is always an option, it is perceived as a last resort and evoked only rarely. In a wide range of professions, adherence to an explicit ethical code is a condition both of initial entry and continued membership or registration. Indeed it is the very fact that the professional is bound by an ethical code that is the client's guarantee. 'Trust me, I'm a doctor' is a cliché that belies the universal belief that the doctor's decision is in my best interests and based solely on clinical considerations. In a profession such as medicine where the ethical norm is to do good for the patient, the professional intends me no harm, indeed is bound to do me good: in ethical terms, the practice is beneficent. Beauchamp and Childress (1983) set out the four principles on which ethical practice in helping professions is based. These are; beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy and justice. Beneficence is one of the four principles of ethics (Beauchamp and Childress, 1983; Henry, 1995) and in doing good for the client, it requires some positive action on the part of the professional, which may extend to advocacy. The principle of non-maleficence or the avoidance of harm, is in effect a default mechanism. Whilst action is also implied, the underlying principle is to take care not to inflict harm by professional action or judgement. The principle of autonomy assumes that the client is capable of making choices, and from this the professional encourages or facilitates the client taking an active role in the decision-making

process. The principle of justice is where the issues of equality and equity come into the professional domain. The four principles do not always stand alone, indeed there is often a playing off of one against the other in order to deliver a professional service. Beneficence may well conflict with autonomy, in the example of a blood transfusion being the clinical recommendation, but unacceptable to the patient. One particular principle can form the basis for the whole orientation of a profession: in medicine we as patients understand the over riding principle is beneficence. In guidance, it is autonomy. In many public services, it is in consideration of justice that issues of equality of opportunity and resource allocation is most evident. Justice is the final principle, which requires that which is fair. In a sense, this is the point of entry for the utilitarianists (Winkler and Coombs, 1993) in their quest for the greatest good for the greatest number, even though this implies some disadvantage for some, the minority. For public service professionals, the principle of justice is the ethical principle most evident in the consideration of how limited resources are allocated to unlimited demand. That is not to suppose that such considerations are not to be found in private practice, but the operational ethos of payment for service rendered means the question of justice is seen as a consideration for the client to address, not the professional. Henry (1995) warns of the temptation to view economy *per se* as an ethical principle. Where the decision has to be made between delivering a level of care, or delivering a level of budget expenditure, to ensure the budget at the expense of the care plan is not to have made a decision on ethical grounds. In public service however, the issue is to use the money fairly, to apply the ethical principle of justice.

If autonomous practice as a professional represents a measure of freedom, there is a concomitant responsibility: 'You alone are responsible for the decisions that will ultimately support the welfare of the client' (Birdsall & Hubert, 2000, p.30). Wall (1993) however asserts that ethics is not solely the preserve of professionals, but equally that of managers. The question of ethical norms becomes an issue for management when output related funding is predicated on a value set that does not

align with the values of the profession being managed. Henry (1995, p.17) again cautions that ‘institution change...brings dangerous pitfalls without sound and shared values’. Once there is the suspicion that the decision-making process is based on considerations beyond client interest, contract compliance for instance, cracks appear in the relationship between client and professional. Not only does the professional have to deal with pressure from management, but also from clients. The pressure mounts.

2.4.3 The Audit Process

The auditing of contract compliance for the DfEE core contract for guidance providers falls to the Government Offices for the Regions. The targets themselves are predominantly quantitative, and although nominally agreed with the careers company the perception of the professionals in this research is that they are largely imposed, a perception also found in the DfEE performance assessment survey (DfEE, 1997a, para.19) which specifically evaluated the action plans target regime. Warren Piper (1992, p.146) believes that: ‘professionals are accountable for how they do their work and for their ethics only to fellow professionals. Those ethics may require that they put the interests of their clients above that of themselves or their employers’. It would seem from the field research that careers guidance professionals are playing out these tensions. There is always a danger, with any kind of evaluative framework, that what gets counted is what gets done. The strategic imperative to secure core funding, for organisations emerging from the shelter of local education authorities, has been great, and careers providers have worked hard to meet, and in some cases exceed their targets.

2.4.4 Securing funding through value for money

Many of the public sector reforms in the United Kingdom which took place under the Conservative administration (Thomson, 1992; Flynn, 1993) (sometimes referred to as ‘New Right’ policies) (Watts 1991; Lawrence, 1992) were intended to ensure value

for money in public sector spending. For those in the public sector offering professional services, the evidence in support of their claim to be offering value for money had to comprise something more objective than the assertion on the professionals' part that a necessary service had been efficiently delivered.

In reviewing what she describes as a period of radical change in public sector management, covering the period 1979-1992, Thomson is clear that the original push for this kind of accountability came from the Thatcher administration and its belief in and insistence on 'the discipline of the market' (1992, p.33). The Major administration carried forward this policy, introducing a series of charters which detailed the level of service a user could expect from public professional services, including Health and Education. Thomson sees this emphasis on outputs and quality of service having a direct impact on public sector management, requiring 'a shift from administration to management; from the enforcement of defined processes to the rules of discretion' (1992, p.35) and predicts that public service scrutiny is a concern 'shared by all three political parties' (1992, p.37).

The Labour election victory of 1997 did not immediately offer the promise of a return to the status quo ante for the public professional and not all policy analysts predicted the rules of discretion making an immediate comeback. Writing early in the Labour administration, Boyne (1998) foresaw a possible return to bureaucracy rather than a laissez-faire policy for public service delivery. He acknowledges that the effectiveness of public service is difficult to define and measure, but warns that performance indicators will be sought; indicators not only of the work done in terms of quantitative recording of actions or interventions, but performance indicators which both measure what is done and go further, in demonstrating the added value of the public service delivered. He anticipated that Labour would move forward on the policy of compulsory competitive tendering towards a policy of 'Best Value'. Rather than requiring providers to compete for contract renewal every 3 or 5 years, given the

drain on human organisational resource this requires (especially hard given that any over-capacity or dead wood would have been taken out of a public service organisation decades ago) the existing provider will be awarded continuation of the contract they successfully won in the tendering round, if they can articulate a defence of the status quo ante; that is, if they can offer convincing evidence that they have delivered the efficiency on the basis of which they were successful in the first place. Boyne is not pessimistic however, predicting that those who can demonstrate added value will be rewarded for good performance.

McLeod & Machin (1998) also discuss the effect of the continuing need to respond to Government Policy characterising this as a hard task, a 'constant struggle to demonstrate their moral and practical legitimacy, in order to justify their funding from either government or charitable sources' (p.333). For careers companies the funding mechanism is explicitly predicated on targets, even in the second term of contracting: 'We will be setting targets for the Careers Service in its new role, and will evaluate its effectiveness against these, with a view to promoting continuing improvement' (DfEE, 1998e) and 'quarterly targets will vary between (careers) services, but they must be measurable' (DfEE, 1999a, p.2). With an emphasis on targets, measurable targets, comes the organisational response to prioritise the measuring of targets over other activities, the trap Power (1997) warns of the danger of the efficiency of an organisation being constructed around the audit process itself.

2.4.5 Performance measurement and professional regulation

There is little doubt that there is a continuing need for performance indicators which measure what is done; the quantitative approach so evident in the target-setting which bound careers companies. In addition, however, there is a need for some indication of the added value the public service has delivered; a more qualitative

approach, which takes into account the softer management information. Having expressed confidence that good performance will be rewarded, Boyne (1998) calls on public service itself to articulate a defence of its priorities by undertaking empirical research to demonstrate both value for money and the elusive value added. Smith (1995) looks at the relationship between performance indicators and outcomes in the public sector, and argues that their role is important, but questionable. He sees the belief in performance indicators as objective is misplaced, as any measure must be placed firmly in the context of public sector: 'performance indicators need to be applied within a system of control which is sensitive to the peculiarities of the public sector. In particular it is futile to think that they can ever provide an "objective" measure of performance' (1995, p.16). The sensitivity referred to is the awareness that public sector is distinct from the private sector because: 'there is no consensus as to what constitutes outcome, and crucially, there is no financial transaction to act as the final arbiter' (1995, p.15). Smith argues that there needs to be some mediation which takes account of these peculiarities, added to which is the problem of time lapse in public service: 'the consequences of many interventions - such as in health or education - occur over many years' (Smith, 1995, p.13). Nor is the distillation of causal relationships straightforward as 'benefits may accrue to many parties in very diffuse and indirect ways' (Smith, 1995, p.13). This is not to say that nothing can be measured, nor any convincing evidence of performance be offered. Smith argues against outright rejection of performance indicators, and for an acknowledgement that they are proxy and approximate. He identifies the key to evaluating performance indicators as: 'whether they are reliable indicators of *outcome* for the society of the public sector intervention' (1995, p.13). He goes on (p.141) to argue that public sector performance indicators must reflect a close analysis of operations.

Cave (1990) also identifies the use of performance indicators as being a proxy measure which is used to indicate quality and effectiveness, warning that: 'in the commercial sector, customers are the ultimate arbiters of quality...not so simple in public service' (p.113).

Within this research, the question of measuring what work has been done came up time and again. At the time of the questionnaire administration to Sample X, the careers practitioners were in the thick of a target-driven audit culture, where numerical targets were the only measure of work done for contract compliance. Careers advisers referred to the practice of 'creative accounting', the most commonly quoted example was in relation to groupwork in schools. These sessions were presented in the format required in the terms of the contract, although actually delivered in terms of what the school felt was most appropriate for pupil needs and given timetable pressures, a common practice found in a number of careers services nationally (Bysshe, S., Berry-Lound, D., Ball, B., Buffton, B. & Mulvey, R. (1997). There was no question of under or over reporting of work not done as having been delivered; one concrete example given was that a piece of work done with a large year group would be presented as six pieces of work done with a class group. By the time of the second questionnaire, administered to Sample Y nine months later, there were clear indications that the purely quantitative targets were poised to give way to a points tariff, which would allow for local negotiation with the Government Office for the region to look at the overall work required to meet local need. The focus groups took place two terms after the introduction of the points tariff, and the universal response to my question about the difference the introduction of the points tariff had made was that nothing had changed. The emphasis was still on numerical

targets, with quality issues being much more about administrative procedures (such as ensuring the client's postcode was correct) rather than on the process of careers guidance. Cave (1990) warns of the danger in measuring performance in assuming that any measure is better than none, as bad measuring can be harmful (p.141). He argues that the professions themselves provide a quality assurance function, so the professional body will still supervise professionals employed in public service.

The question of the self-regulation of the careers guidance profession as a whole is interesting. At the time of data collection in this research, there were two recognised qualifications in guidance, both of which satisfied the requirement for an initial professional qualification. The Local Government Management Board (LGMB) makes the award of Diploma in Careers Guidance Parts One and Two. Part One is delivered in educational establishments by a range of attendance modes including full-time, part-time and distance learning. The majority of course centres are situated within Higher Education establishments, and the qualification is postgraduate, with either a first degree or substantial relevant experience as a pre-requisite for entry. Part Two of the qualification is delivered on the job, through the employing careers guidance organisation, working to the LGMB's core objectives (LGMB, 1992). On completion of Part Two, often referred to as the probationary year, the practitioner is deemed able to undertake autonomous practice. A parallel pathway to initial professional qualification is offered through the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Guidance, which is delivered entirely on the job by the employer. Both qualifications require successful candidates to demonstrate an understanding of ethics in practice. For the LGMB the requirement is: 'by the end of part 1, trainees will understand the relevance of ethical issues to professional

practice’ (LGMB, 1994, A2:10). For the NVQ4 Guidance the elements of competence in relation to ethical practice are to: ‘Operate within an agreed ethical code of practice...any conflicts between agreed ethical code and own values and beliefs are recognised and managed’ (Open University Validation Services, 1992, p.9). Both qualification routes are explicit in promoting, indeed requiring explicit consideration of ethics for professional practice.

The Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) clearly understands that ethics is crucial in underpinning guidance practice, and is explicit in its consideration of ethics as a strategic imperative both in achieving chartered status, and in regulating the profession. A review of the Ethics and Standards committee of the Institute states unequivocally the: ‘central importance of the Institute’s approach to the maintenance of professional ethics and standards for the pursuit of chartered status’ (ICG, 1997b, para.4). The Institute’s intention to establish itself as: ‘*the* professional organisation for guidance practitioners in the UK....with identified imperatives for ethics and standards, and critically, the need for a *Register of Practitioners* to protect both clients and guidance deliverers’ (ICG, 1999) has resulted in such a register. Those wishing to be registered must satisfy the Ethics Committees’s requirements in relation to ethical practice and continued professional development. Crucially, however, neither membership of, nor registration with the ICG is yet a requirement for careers guidance practice, so the span of control in relation to the regulation of the profession by its own professional body is severely restricted.

2.4.6 Professions and social accounting

Friedman *et al.* (2000) in their work on UK professional associations, identify the main challenge facing professional associations as self-regulation. They warn that

unless professional bodies take responsibility for regulation of their profession, they run the risk of being regulated by an external body under Government authority. Self-regulation needs to be transparent, and to emphasise the need for accountability in professional practice. They advise professional bodies to take account of the importance of social reporting, by which they mean being accountable to stakeholders, not only to paying clients, and Chatrik (1996) advocates social reporting as a performance indicator specifically for careers advisers. This point is important for public service professions, such as careers guidance because of the ambiguity about who exactly is the customer and therefore what should be the concern of customer care. Social reporting would redress the current imbalance between the end-user and the paymaster in their respective influence over the management of a public service, and as such, seeks to restore a voice to the voiceless.

2.5 The relationship between practitioners: the community of practice

The final context for the consideration of relationships involving careers guidance professionals is in the domain of occupational identity. The relations between fellow professionals within and across organisations give rise to a sense of belonging to an occupational grouping or a community of practice. Within this community are issues of entry, belonging and regulation. These in turn give rise to questions of commitment to ethical practice and continued professional development and the need for learning at individual, organisational and community levels in relation to the practitioners involved in this research.

The DfEE's evaluation of the management of change in careers services (DfEE, 1998b, para. 417) commented that most careers advisers perceived themselves to be members of a careers service rather than employees of a particular company. This is

interesting because although the provision of careers guidance has been national, delivery has always been at a local level, initially through LEAs and latterly through careers companies. So, although practitioners may perceive themselves as part of an overarching careers service, such a service is more a construct than an entity. The construct of a unified careers service would align however with that of a community of practice, which is recurrent in the literature both in relation to professionalism and in relation to learning. Rolls (1997) makes explicit the inter-relationship between the community of practice and formal learning, when she argues for the self-regulation of an occupational group by the incorporation of 'the values and attitudes of an occupational group' into the languages and structures of national occupational standards (1997, p.203). Warren Piper (1992) sees the regulation of professional work being a personal responsibility with reference to the profession rather than to the paymaster: 'Professionals are accountable for *how* they do their work and for their ethics only to fellow professionals. Those ethics may require that they put the interests of their clients above that of themselves or their employers' (Warren Piper, 1992, p.146, original emphasis). Thompson argues that the suggested distinction between the ethical behaviour practised in professional life and those values which govern behaviour in everyday life does not really hold good: 'if you want to know a person's values, look at their ethical choices' (1999, p.11). Whilst it may be a false dichotomy to distinguish between the personal and professional at an individual level, a shared value system, expressed in ethical standards, is an important element in a community of practice. Braun and Bell (1995, p.28) identify the primary issue for those occupational roles covered by the Advice, Guidance, Counselling and Psychotherapy Lead Body is how to address ethical issues when dealing with an outcome-based system concerned with functions and performance. They argue that good practice in these occupational roles, of which Guidance is one, cannot be separated from ethics and equality. They point out the need for debate across the sector, but debate informed by ethical considerations. Corey *et al.* (1993) offer a comprehensive guide to ethics in helping professions, but focus exclusively on the

individual practitioner, and maintain that acting responsibly is an inner quality, not something which can be imposed by an external authority. Brien (1998) echoes this lack of faith in external control, arguing that a code of ethics cannot truly be implemented or enforced. Indeed the whole point of a profession's code of ethics is that it trusts the individual: 'at the heart of such codes will be the vision of professionalism for that profession' (Brien, 1998, p.392). Nevertheless professional bodies expect members to subscribe, and often to be bound by an ethical code of conduct.

The Ethics committee of the Institute of Careers Guidance (1997b, para. 4) is clear that the code has a function over and above acting as a guide to conduct which protects practitioners and clients alike, acknowledging 'the central importance of the Institute's approach to the maintenance of professional ethics and standards for the pursuit of chartered status.' The Institute goes on to warn that it will take action against members who breach the code (1997b, para. 82). The impact of this assertion is somewhat diminished in the context of practice, in that you do not have to be a member of the Institute to practise as a careers guidance professional. Henry (1996, p.43) also argues that there is a vital role for the treatment of ethics in the fields of guidance and counselling, and maintains that professionals themselves should be involved in explaining and defending those values which are shared.

Warren Piper (1992) considers whether or not the role of university teacher is a profession, and examines this in the light of where lecturers position themselves in professional terms. He offers the example of a university lecturer in Drama, who positions himself at the teaching end of the drama profession rather than at the drama end of the teaching profession. In this he concludes that the lecturer is identifying with his chosen profession as a whole, rather than taking on the occupational identity implicated by the paid work actually undertaken. I would argue that the concept of a continuum of practice is useful: it allows people to locate themselves by job function

or work role within the common professional grouping. It admits role difference whilst holding all the players within a community of practice, with all that implies for shared values. Such a continuum allows the three discourses Collin identifies (Collin, 2000, p.6) as necessary within the occupational area: the professional; the managerial and the academic.

As discussed earlier in this section (see 2.1.2 above), Steadman *et al.* (1994) identify four overlapping value sets: legal; organisational; occupational and personal. They see issues arising where there is some conflict within the overlap across two sets, for example between the organisational and occupational value sets, or the occupational and personal. Henry (1995) also warns of potential problems arising when there is this lack of congruence between the values of the individual and the ethical practice of their employing organisation: 'conflict arises from a mismatch between organisational and professional values' (p. 52). She recommends the use of an Ethical Values Audit (EVA) which is a common checklist used independently by managers and by professionals in an organisation to map the values of both parties. Subsequent comparison of these mapping exercises will show up congruence in value sets, but will also identify areas of dissonance, where managers and professionals are working to differing, perhaps competing ethics and values. Once the source and scope of the conflict is established, a solution can be worked on. Personal ethics are not enough. If professionals are employed in organisations then there will be managers. These managers may be drawn from the professional ranks of guidance practice or transfer across from other management contexts. Either way, consideration needs to be given to the value set which underpins the guidance and that management practice which informs strategy. Wall (1993) writes from the viewpoint of the manager, and makes the point that if ethics is presented solely as the concern of the professional, where does that leave the manager? He argues that 'poor results [in the National Health Service] are ethically dubious' (1993, p.8) and suggests that the challenge facing managers is not only to make decisions in a

political setting, but to do so ethically (Wall, 1993, p.103). Warnock (1998) does not shy from bringing the issue of resource allocation into the ethical arena, admitting: 'in my own view it is perfectly reasonable to take into account the expense of keeping alive a PVS [permanent vegetative state] patient' (p.37).

When a client consults with a professional, they do so because they believe the professional has greater expertise which s/he will use to best effect for the good of the client. Given the inherent imbalance of power in this relationship, the client will always be perceived as vulnerable. Once professionals are employed in business organisations, the question of liability goes beyond the individual practitioner to include the employer in discharging a duty of care. The issue then for the organisation is how to ensure the regulation of its employees while respecting their autonomy. As Brien (1998, p.407) puts it: 'who would trust an organisation that did not respect the professionalism of its professionals or seeks to promote it?' Rather than directly regulating the client-professional imbalance, either by Government legislation or by self-regulation of the profession as a whole, Brien argues for non interference, so that aiming for the goal of trust between client and professional will indirectly engender ethical behaviour. In managing public service policy initiatives, it is arguable that ethics is too important not to be left to the professionals.

2.5.1 The role of learning within the community of practice

Eraut lists the components of responsibility to be found within the professional domain:

- A moral commitment to serve the interests of clients;
- A professional obligation to self-monitor and to periodically review the effectiveness of one's practice;
- A professional obligation to expand one's repertoire, to reflect on one's experience and to develop one's expertise;

- An obligation that is professional as well as contractual to contribute to the quality of one's organisation;
- An obligation to reflect upon and contribute to discussions about the changing role of one's profession in wider society. (Eraut, 1992, p.9)

In line with these recommendations, The Institute of Career Guidance requires two ongoing commitments from practitioners who seek inclusion on the Professional Register. One is to practise by the Institute's code of ethics, the other is to undertake continued professional development (CPD). The importance of CPD for the individual is that it ensures practice keeps up with innovation; the importance of CPD for the profession is that the sharing of such learning ensures the development of the collective knowledge base, the next generation of learning for the profession (Engeström *et al.*, 1995).

In order to transfer what they have learnt from solving a problem in one context to a problem presented in another context, the individual practitioner will need to reflect on their practice and on what they have learnt from it. Winter (1991) lays emphasis on the upward spiral where a learner reflects on their working practice, identifies a learning outcome which then feeds into their professional practice, which is in turn the object of further reflection. The practice is no longer predicated on a fixed body of knowledge, but on a continuous development of the theory which underpins the practice it develops. Fish (1991, p.23) identifies four strands of reflection within the Schön (1987) model of reflective practice. She identifies these strands of reflection as essential to the effective supervision of practice in health visiting and initial teacher training. They are:

- a) Factual - description of situation, then of practitioner's feelings;
- b) Retrospective - wholist reflection on what was new, what discovered;
- c) Sub-stratum - cultural or contextual assumptions, and
- d) Connective - linking to further practice.

These strands are not linear or necessarily sequential, but the professional can weave them together in reflecting on a learning interaction either with a patient/pupil or with their supervisor. Whilst Fish offers these insights into professional formation, she is adamant that they are not recommendations: ‘as that would be the technical/rational school of professionalism’ and she prefers the ‘professional artistry model’ (Fish, 1991, p.79). Eraut argues the importance of critical control of ‘largely intuitive aspects of practice’ (1989, p.184) is essential for the transfer of knowledge practice to a wider range of situations, and is desirable for the improvement of performance in familiar situations. Lave (1991, p.64) depicts learning as ‘a social phenomenon constituted in the experienced, lived-in world’ and argues that within a community of practice there is a relationship between those who are well established and those coming into the profession. She argues that these two ends of the practice spectrum should be depicted not as teacher/pupil or expert/novice, but as oldtimers and newcomers (Lave, 1991, p.68). She also indicates the essential iteration within a community of practice, a circle of life where ‘newcomers’ enter the community, are accepted and become ‘oldtimers’. She goes on to identify as a third category those who have completed this circle; the ‘newcomers-become-oldtimers’. The relationship between oldtimers and newcomers is one of *mutual* [emphasis added] dependency; ‘the newcomers (are dependent) in order to learn, and the oldtimers in order to carry on the community of practice...success of both new and old members depends on the eventual replacement of the oldtimers by newcomers-become-oldtimers themselves’ (Lave, 1991, p.74). Underlying this mutual dependency is a tension which permeates the learning process.

Engeström (1994, p.11) states that there is a misconception about learning, which assumes that learning is receiving knowledge, and practising skills by repeating the same tasks. He argues that ‘learning is constructing’ (Engeström, 1994, p.12) rather than repetition and storing and distinguishes three levels of learning. First order learning (Engeström, 1994, p.15) is a form of conditioning, typically imitating. In

first order learning the focus is limited to the immediate task. Second order learning (Engeström, 1994, p.16) identifies general patterns and covering laws for good behaviour, and it embraces some investigative learning. Third order learning (Engeström, 1994, p.17) happens when the learner questions the task and transforms the context itself. This questioning can occur as cognitive conflict, which is often the stimulus or basis for deep learning;

‘ Cognitive conflicts as a source of motivation creates a *context of criticism* [original emphasis] at the beginning of the process of investigative learning. Students become aware of limits and contradictions in their practice and in the knowledge and tools they routinely use. Such a critical stance lays a vitally important groundwork for the construction of new knowledge and new forms of practice.’ (Engeström, 1994, p.24)

Whilst this relates primarily to the individual’s learning, there must be some widening from the individual to the collective to develop the knowledge base shared by the community of practice, and the impetus of conflict for learning is found in this wider context too. The ‘collective zone of proximal development’ (Engeström, 1994, p.44) is the contested area between traditional practice and alternative future directions.

This research demonstrates such cognitive conflicts across both samples. Such conflicts seem more particularly experienced, and certainly more explicitly articulated by those practitioners who have practised for longer; those who have achieved mastery of their practice. Perhaps an outcome of the pressure on guidance professionals, if given the time and space to reflect, would be the development of shared knowledge.

One respondent made the comment that the policy initiatives failed to understand what careers guidance can do for clients: *‘I am depressed that it has not, apparently, been possible so far to suggest to Government agencies that a more enlightened*

approach to control of careers guidance activities is necessary and can work' (X28). She went on to comment on the role of the professional body; although the only voice to bring the professional body into the debate, her comment was plaintive: *'I feel, perhaps unjustifiably, there has been a failure/betrayal by our own professional bodies'* (X28).

There is clear evidence of conflict within the sample, and evidence of a ongoing struggle to make sense of the way things are in careers guidance, coupled with an anticipation that further policy changes presage more change and adjustment from practitioners. Within this playing out of conflict lies an opportunity for investigative learning for the whole careers guidance profession.

SECTION 3

THE RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Framing the approach

The research cycle started formally in September 1996 when I enrolled on the MPhil/PhD programme at the University of Surrey. The first year comprised a compulsory research methods course, which I completed successfully in July 1997. At this point, in order to continue with the same supervisor, I transferred to the University of Warwick. From the start of the MPhil/Ph.D studies, I have kept a personal learning diary to record issues and problems, and reflect on my own learning as a researcher (Kolb, 1984; Boud *et al*, 1989; Schön, 1991). An early expression of my research problem in the diary dated July 1997, reads:

‘As a result of recent legislation, careers guidance professionals now have to perform to outcomes/targets that are imposed on their employing organisations through the funding mechanism. Both professionals and their managers have to find a way of managing, in order to secure funding in public service terms, or sufficient business in private sector practice. This has led to tensions which I want to look at. I also want to see if differing ethical approaches can explain, and with application, ease the management of autonomous professionals. I want to find a better way of managing for autonomous professionals.’

The research problem has been refined as my work has developed, and was more accurately expressed in August 2000 as:

‘Drawing on the relevant theoretical concepts from existing knowledge bases in ethics, management and guidance, I intend to analyse the experience of practitioners and team leaders in a careers company. By considering their strategies for dealing with externally imposed targets, I

will examine the interaction of theory with practice in the context of target driven companies managing autonomous guidance professionals.'

The original intention had been to produce theory that is useful to people engaged in careers guidance, but particularly professionals and their managers at operational and strategic levels. The underlying value was accessibility, that the theory should make sense to the many who engage in careers guidance practice, not just the few who engage in careers guidance theory. My growing understanding of what constitutes valid research (Bryman 1992; Hammersely, 1993b; Gleeson & Shain; 1999) and of how professional knowledge is developed and shared (Lave, 1991; Engeström & Cole, 1993) encouraged me to see my research into these practitioners as offering a new perspective from which to make sense of their professional experience.

Strauss and Corbin argue that 'a well constructed grounded theory will meet 4 central criteria for judging the applicability of theory to a phenomenon: fit, understanding, generality and control' but warn that findings should be 'faithful to the everyday reality of the substantive area' (1990, p.23). Glaser & Strauss, in their definitive work, explain the value of generating theory from data: 'Grounded theory...fits empirical situations and is understandable to sociologists and laymen alike' (1967, p.1). The intention is to produce accessible theory, readily understandable by virtue of its derivation from the data gathered, through a process of sifting and refining. This contrasts starkly with the positivist approach taken in the early development of social science theory, where an existing theory is tested out; an imposition from outside the data and their context, rather than an evolution of theory from within.

These early indications of what my research question actually sought to achieve demonstrate a definite concern that my research be perceived as useful to a group of professionals engaged in a specific context. McLeod (1994) would see this stance as indicative of the phenomenological approach which seeks to 'develop a

theory...of phenomenon that is demonstrably faithful to the actual lived experience of the people being studied' (1994, p.92). Sharman, and Webb (1988) offer a rationale for using grounded research where the intention of the research is to transcend paradigms, to go 'beyond existent theories in search of new understanding' (Sharman & Webb, 1988, p.123). They also argue that a grounded research approach is 'useful for evaluation of policies' (Sharman & Webb, 1988, p.139); apt therefore to appraise the experience of careers guidance professionals during a period of policy change.

Whilst Glaser and Strauss propose methods which are intended to further qualitative research, they do not dismiss quantitative method out of hand:

'both forms of data (qualitative and quantitative) are necessary - as mutual verification and most important for us, as different forms of data on the same subject, which, when compared, will each generate theory' (1967, p.18). Whilst the rhetoric of grounded research eschews the testing approach which characterised the development of sociological theory, the research must, at some level, have some *a priori* assumptions. Such assumptions do not necessarily function as definitive or absolute rules which the research seeks to prove, but offer a mechanism for the initial conceptualisation which draws on existing knowledge, either of the field or of the researcher involved. An important distinction is then made. Rather than treating assumptions as fixed from the outset, with a rigidity which cannot take account of new data or new thinking which emerges during the research process, these assumptions are seen as an initial starting point. In this light, they are fixed points only in terms of taking bearings from which to orient the research.

Cohen and Manion suggest that not all knowledge bases are equally developed: 'some theories, as in the natural sciences, are characterised by a high degree of elegance and sophistication; others, like educational theory, are only at the early

stages of formulation and are thus characterised by great unevenness' (1994, p.15). If educational theory is perceived as not yet at a high level of sophistication, the same is certainly applicable to the theory of careers company management. Much of the existing literature is policy-relevant, if not explicitly policy-driven, thus offering a particular, sometimes partial perspective. With specific consideration of the need for research in career guidance, Savickas (2000) concludes that the existing theoretical models are coming to the end of their useful life. Where practitioners have undertaken research and researchers have attempted to connect their research with practice, the end result has not always been successful synergy, but role confusion; being stuck in the middle, to paraphrase Porter (1985). Savickas proposes a scholar-practitioner model may be more attractive and productive. This would allow each to play to his or her strengths (as scholar or as practitioner) whilst allowing both to share data, findings and perspective for mutual benefit. But he warns: 'If we are to develop a research culture and improve communications between practitioners and researchers, then we must move beyond the positivist-constructivist debate that engulfs much of the social sciences' (Savickas, 2000, p.4). The challenge is to transcend the methodological debate and to engage in effective, reliable research which can add to the knowledge base which sustains the community of practice.

3.2 The research strategy

Johansson (1995) sees the focus on research problem informing the researcher's perspective, and in turn determining the choice of appropriate method. This consideration of appropriate method underpins the strategy which the researcher devises to address the research question. For Black (1993) the challenge of research design is to ensure validity, objectivity and reliability through rigour in application. Hammersley (1993b) challenges the debate between qualitative and quantitative method, suggesting it is somewhat irrelevant. The issue of research

method is not a simple question of ideological persuasion, but of choosing the method which is good (in the sense of appropriate) for the research.

Cohen and Manion argue that positivism is limited in the study of human behaviour: 'where positivism is less successful, however, is in its application to the study of human behaviour, where the immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world' (1994, p.12). Given that my research focuses on careers guidance professionals to see how they have experienced externally triggered changes, it is clear that a positivist approach will not be appropriate. The intangible qualities Cohen and Manion (1994, p.12) refer to above can be very telling. Those shades of meaning which individuals attach to their personal experience illuminate the collective experience, permitting a sense of the collegial reaction in their range of response to external influence. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) condemn the neglect of such intangible qualities in research on policy implementation; 'neglect of the phenomenology of change, that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended - is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms' (1991 p.4). They see the challenge for researchers in this area is to combine the grand perspective, looking at what the reform intended to achieve, without overlooking the detail of the lived experience for the individuals in the panorama.

Edwards (1998, p.32) identifies a noticeable lack of coverage of the experience of careers guidance professionals and in particular a lack of coverage of experienced practitioners. He argues that a more discursive approach would facilitate progress from the well-run theory versus practice divide towards a more effective, less contested development of 'knowledgeable practice' (Edwards (1998, p.24). Collin also identifies discourses which career guidance practitioners have to 'negotiate' (2000, p.6), namely: academic; professional and managerial. Such discourse

diversity within a professional role is not uncommon, and could be viewed as inevitable once professionals are working in organisations, particularly so in the public sector. Any profession which requires that members adhere to professional standards and commit to continued professional development will expect members to engage in dialogue and debate amongst those included on the professional register. It is likely that a profession which realises that it must act to thrive or risk atrophy, will want to push back the boundaries of shared knowledge and is therefore drawn towards the academic discourse. The public sector inevitably entails managerialist engagement because resource allocation in the public funding domain is questioned keenly and debated publicly (Farnham & Horton, 1999). An articulate defence of professional practice within the public sector is necessary to secure resource allocation. Collin goes on to compare and contrast the derivations of the underpinning knowledge base for UK and USA career guidance practitioners. Unlike the USA, the UK has: 'few home-grown major theories of career, but they draw upon several disciplines. This eclecticism may reflect the historical development...but it creates a sense of fragmentation in the thinking about, and application of, theory in research and practice' (Collin, 2000, p.6).

This research does not aim to produce a major, home-grown theory of career, but to use grounded theory approach to investigate a particular episode or phenomenon. It seeks to identify the multiple sources of pressure on professionals which accrue from a range of contexts within which careers guidance practitioners found themselves practising in the wake of privatisation.

It is clear that consideration of the client is crucial both for practitioners in ethical terms, and for managers in terms of strategic planning (Hartley, Cordingley and Benington, 1995; ICG, 1997b, 1999). The literature on professional ethics, almost by definition, looks at how ethical codes affect practice (Bayles, 1989; Corey *et al.*, 1993; Henry, 1995, 1996) or seeks to help autonomous practitioners make

sense of complex situations by working through scenarios within an ethical framework (Tschudin, 1994; Allison & Ewens, 1998; Cottone and Tarvydas, 1998; Birdsall & Hubert, 2000). There is some consideration of ethics in the context of developing strategy for competitive advantage (Mudrack *et al.*, 1999) and some consideration of ethics in the context of the management of professionals, particularly in the public sector (Exworthy & Halford, 1999; Joyce, 1999). Yet Wallace *et al.* (1999) warn of the dangers when values and beliefs within organisational culture are not congruent across the occupational, organisational and national level, and Watkins *et al.* (1996) contend that there are few models for managing professionals, despite the need for sensitive management to steer a path between the respect for professional autonomy and the need to demonstrate that contracted work has been delivered.

Hillage (1998) surveyed the impact of research on teachers in schools, to identify characteristics of excellence in research, and identified two issues as germane. The first issue is that 'impact' is not a question of immediate action by teachers in the light of new research findings. The second issue is that 'impact' is not necessarily a question of instant recall of a particular piece of research or recall of a particular researcher by name when questioning teachers about their practice. The impact of research is more likely to be cumulative; a gradual, almost imperceptible shift in collective thinking away from the old, familiar paradigm towards the new paradigm. Nevertheless a clear finding of educational excellence is that 'actions are insufficiently informed by research' (p.3), which leads on to the recommendation that greater emphasis be placed on the teacher/practitioner experience and this be achieved through the explicit inclusion of the practitioner voice in the research process. The Careers Research Advisory Council recommends: 'more could be done to involve researchers and practitioners in discussions during the course of the research' (CRAC, 1998, Recommendation 10)

and argues that the inclusion of practitioners as key stakeholders would transform the research process itself.

3.2.1 Phasing of the research

The initial phase of the research strategy was to conduct a survey of a group of guidance professionals, using a questionnaire. Subsequent analysis of the data would generate the key issues which would inform on the second phase of the research.

In terms of sampling strategy the phenomenologist approach contrasts with the positivist approach. The concern is to ensure theoretical sensitivity of the sample; that is, a sample which allows the researcher to enter the world of the interviewee (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.42). The sample therefore would include practitioners who are concerned only with their client practice, and practitioners who have some operational management responsibility but exclude strategic managers within the careers companies. The subsequent follow up phase, which might employ focus group methods, would allow practitioners to answer in their own terms, whilst creating a structure for comparability (May, 1996). In terms of professional development, Schön (1987) sees the chance to reflect on action as a crucial development tool; certainly one with which many careers guidance professionals are familiar from their initial training (Kidd *et al.*, 1994; Bimrose & Bayne, 1995). Fish (1991) however, warns that there is a danger in using reflective practice as an instrument applied to others rather than to oneself. The danger is that interviewers who are unskilled in fostering reflection may elicit description rather than analysis during the process of facilitating reflection. I was confident this would not be the case in my focus groups given my expertise in facilitation as a result of my careers guidance practice.

As presented here my research strategy is neither case study in the purest sense (Deem, 1998), nor large-scale survey intended for generalisation (Barrett *et al.*, 1999). My research paradigm is interpretive, my research question is phenomenological and will allow me to survey the range and interplay of influences on professional guidance practitioners and their practice, when working in an explicitly target-driven culture. This articulation of their professional experience will appraise the impact of policy on those who are at the sharp end of implementation.

3.2.2 Developing the research instruments

My attention now focused on the design of the research instruments, firstly a questionnaire. It was clear to me that these respondents, already feeling under some pressure in the workplace would prefer a self-filled questionnaire (May, 1993; Blaxter *et al.*, 1996; Murray & Lawrence, 2000) and I judged that 2 sides of A4 would be an appropriate length, giving some scope for a range of questions, without producing a document which would appear to require more time than people would be willing to make available.

My initial drafts made the distinction between objective and subjective information; with the subjective information grouped into the following key areas: *autonomy, targets, ethics* and *reactions*. It made sense to start with the factual questions first (Bell, 1996; Seale, 1998) then lead the respondent onto the more reflective questions, ending with the ethical considerations, these being the more difficult to answer. I then moved on to phrasing the questions. Initially, given that I would like the possibility of sorting the answers into some kind of category, I decided to offer a five point Likert (1967) scale response rather than leave the answer completely open. Using such a scale would permit gradations among the

responses, and give greater flexibility for both response and analysis (Bryman & Cramer, 1990). The questions about ethics were the most challenging, in that I was not sure to what extent respondents would need to come to the questionnaire with a prior knowledge of ethics, rather than an intuitive or internalised ethical code by which they practised. I found it difficult to phrase questions which were sufficiently precise whilst not leading.

To pilot the research instrument and to gain initial feedback on the question phrasing (Kane, 1985; Bell, 1996; Barrett *et al.*, 1999) I conducted two separate trials on two managers who had specific professional training. The first was a journalist who edits the Arts pages of a national daily newspaper, the second a teacher heading the art department in a secondary school. I asked them to complete the questionnaire as best they could, given it is addressed to a profession other than their own. Their responses were very similar, in that both had difficulty understanding what was meant by targets. The arguments in favour of piloting research instruments warn of such initial setbacks (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Bell, 1996; Murray & Lawrence, 2000), most explicitly warning: 'The respondent may say that he or she doesn't really understand what the question is getting at, or may give a reply that reveals they have interpreted it in a very different way from what was intended' (Seale & Filmer, 1998, p.131). Yet this reaction took me aback somewhat. My perception was that both these professionals do have to meet targets; producing Arts pages daily to an externally imposed deadline, and published exam results and improvement plans respectively. This alerted me to the specific meaning targets had for those involved in careers guidance delivery.

The ethical questions also baffled them, the journalist assuring me that he did not normally have to worry about ethics. Doubtless this is his lived experience, but the National Union of Journalists does have an ethical code, and ethics had been part of his initial journalism training. The art teacher felt that ethics was not something she thought about, just something she did. The ethics section began to feel problematic. With some modifications, I asked a researcher colleague to complete the questionnaire. She suggested changing some wordings to give the respondent a greater sense of ownership. In relation to one question, she queried whether I was concerned with factual information or the individual's response. I duly produced another version ready for a larger pilot.

The objective information in this final pilot questionnaire related to current employment: whether their job was full or part-time; whether their contract was temporary or permanent and the length of employment. These were included as these factors might have an impact on how respondents experienced pressure at work, because of employment uncertainty or insecurity (Cooper, 1994; Watkins & Drury, 1994). There were two questions about qualifications, the first about which guidance qualification was held, the second about how long the professionals had been fully qualified. Another pair of questions related to targets; whether they had to meet targets currently and whether they had had to do so in previous employment.

3.2.3 Planning the pilot

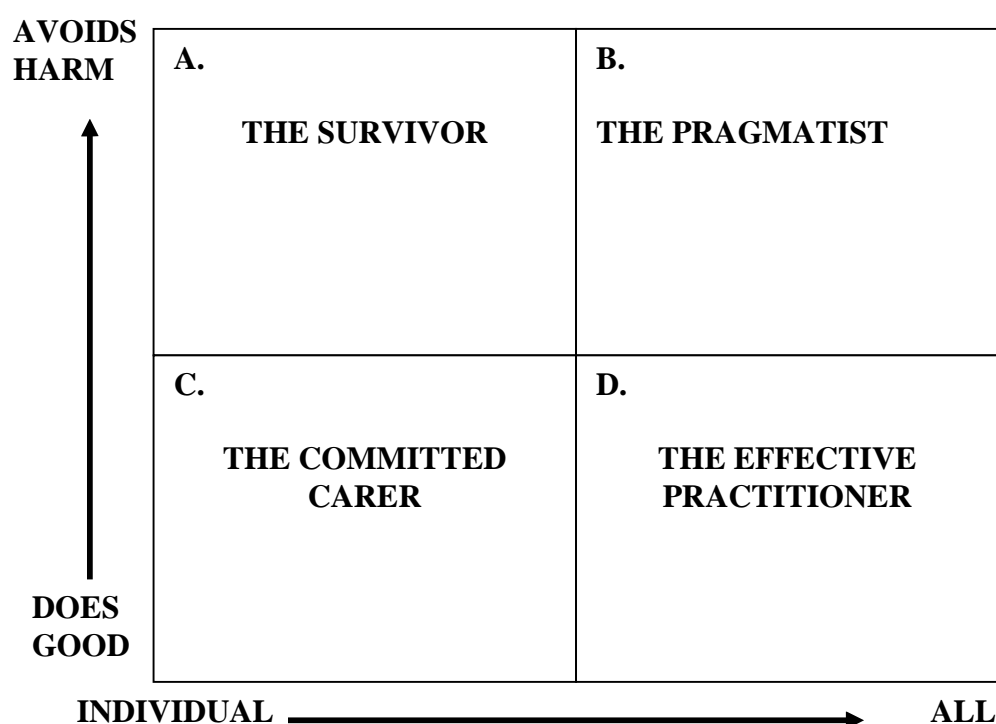
As a teacher on the postgraduate Diploma in Careers Guidance at the University of East London, I teach a module that includes *Ethics* and *Learning and Working as*

a Professional. It was clear that my research fitted in with this curriculum area. My timetable slot followed a visiting speaker from the DfEE presenting research in progress. There seemed good reason to link a pilot of my questionnaire with my teaching already timetabled for May 1997. I sought permission from the course tutor or gatekeeper (Murray & Lawrence, 2000, p.59), who was very supportive and permitted access. There did however, seem to be a lingering ethical question: could asking my students to take part in a pilot be in effect, coercing them, as their teacher, to do what I wanted them to do? I decided to negotiate clearly with the students (British Psychological Society, 1990) and to structure the session so that they could freely choose to remain for the pilot or to leave after the teaching input. I also decided I would leave the room after briefing the group so as not to inhibit or influence them, although this meant I would not be around if there were specific questions they wanted to ask. In the event, I was quite heartened by the warmth of their reception and their interest in the research problem.

My intention had been to use the piloted questionnaire to get a snapshot of the lived experience of some careers guidance professionals. Originally, I thought it would be possible to use an ethical framework to explain how these professionals managed their work. By asking specific questions about the framework within which they made decisions about how they practised whilst trying to deliver to targets, I hoped to elicit a complementary perspective for their lived experience post-privatisation. Cohen & Manion (1994, p.223) offer this definition of triangulation: ‘the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour’, and Winter (1989) suggests paying attention to more than one perspective ensures triangulation. Murray & Lawrence (2000, p.134) contend that triangulation is: ‘conceptually elusive and much misused in social and educational research’. They argue that it is too easy to conflate triangulation and reliability.

In this research, the important distinction between reliability and triangulation is observed; comparing the rhetoric of careers service reform with the reality of careers provision delivery, would offer two angles ready for the completing third perspective gleaned from analysis of the data collected. By plotting two axes I devised a quadrant which, I thought, would offer a mechanism for sorting respondents. I thought that if I could discern any patterns of distribution among the quadrants against the differing functions of professionals, by comparing professional with manager, I would arrive at some useful conclusions: see Figure 4.

Figure 4: ethical principles matrix



The vertical axis plots the ethical continuum which underpins the professional's interventions with clients. This goes from the principle of beneficence i.e. actively doing good for the client, to the principle of non-maleficence i.e. the avoidance of harm. The horizontal axis plots from the principle of being concerned with the rights and needs of the individual client, which maps broadly onto the ethical

principle of autonomy, to the principle of justice, in which domain the issue of resource allocation in public service professionals is most acutely argued. The two axes then form four quadrants depicting ethical behaviours, which I thought might be a way of understanding competing reports from respondents in relation to pressures. These might then illustrate the variation of differing perspectives taken by individuals within the same careers organisation. However several competing explanations for any allocation of respondents to quadrants, however tentative, could be proposed. These could include theories of differing personality types, contextual constraints within which people perform at work and the underlying work ethic of the individuals concerned. Practitioners and managers alike in the contracted-out careers companies have to make sense of competing ethical dimensions in their work, and their approach to dealing with these dilemmas seemed likely to offer a new approach to managing.

The difficulty I then encountered was the choice between setting up a sufficiently robust set of descriptors on the questionnaire which would lead me to a typology of respondents, or probing deeper into the experience of the professionals involved. As my understanding of research method developed, it became clear that I was clinging to a realist paradigm of theory-testing, thereby running the risk of blocking 'the generation of a more rounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.27). The underlying assumption was that there was some objectivity out there, something universal and absolute; the search was on for governing laws. Miles & Huberman (1994) see this attempt at a causal explanation to be a continuum, with a blurred area where the realist search for social phenomena which exist in the objective world shades into an interpretivist search for subjective commentary on a social phenomenon: 'we can go far beyond the snapshot - assess causality as it actually plays out in a particular session' (p.10). It became clear that the descriptors I had set up in Figure 4 (see above, p.95) might permit some initial allocation of respondents to four categories, but would not help me to uncover the

lived experience of the professional finding their way through change: change which challenged value systems, discernible in ethical tensions. I realised that I was interested in the way professionals went about solving problems, resolving dilemmas; the process of management, primarily the way autonomous practitioners manage themselves within a target culture. The questionnaire was further modified, allowing the respondent to decide how much time to allocate to their answers, and allowing the possibility of much more open-ended answers alongside the factual data. Respondents were also invited to indicate whether or not they would be prepared to continue their involvement in the research by opting into the second phase, and taking part in a focus group. This final questionnaire, the version actually used for the data collection, is attached as an appendix (Appendix 1).

3.3 The sample: access and composition

The next stage was to obtain access to a sample of guidance professionals, in the light of sampling strategies in quantitative and qualitative research. In the former, where the intention is to generate covering laws, the question of a representative sample is important (Bryman & Cramer, 1990; Black, 1993). In qualitative method the emphasis is on ensuring a sample which permits the researcher to 'discover important questions, processes and relationships' (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.43). I chose an established LEA county careers service which had obtained the contract to deliver careers guidance after privatisation (DfEE, 1995) so did not have the organisational change and mergers with which some other contract winners had to contend. The careers company was not in the initial wave of reform, so could benefit from the experience of the 'Pathfinder' companies (DfEE, 1996; 1997a; 1997b). I approached the then Chief Executive of this company, who suggested I negotiate with the Staff Development Manager for access to their annual conference. This occasion is the only time all the professionals from across the company assemble, and is an important component

of the continuing professional development offered by the organisation. A keynote speaker is invited to set the tone by focussing on current issues in careers guidance. A programme of six workshops is then offered, from which delegates can choose to attend two. The composition of the workshops is intended to respond to the training needs of the practitioners as perceived by the Training Manager. Kreuger (1994, p.83) uses the phrase 'piggy-backing' to describe the practice of maximising the use of an existing grouping of possible respondents for the purposes of research.

In the light of wanting to give something to those who were interested in being involved in the research, I offered to run a workshop in addition to administering the questionnaire. As the Chief Executive with whom I had initially negotiated access was working notice by the end of 1997, there was a real danger that I would not be able to re-negotiate access once he left the company, so I went ahead with the data collection in January 1998, rather earlier than intended. The early start on data collection brought my research ever more firmly into the area of grounded research, as it allowed me to conduct the literature search simultaneously with the data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.41).

I offered to run a workshop on Stress Management, but was explicit that this included the administration of a questionnaire for my research. In this way, I felt I could offer something useful to those who choose my session, and satisfy both my need for data with their need for techniques to deal with stress. Selected correspondence relating to my access to this sample (referred to as Sample X) is attached as an appendix (Appendix 2). This comprises a letter from the staff development manager of the careers company thanking me for my input and summarising the evaluation of my session. I had a very high take-up for my workshop, and was allocated the largest room available. A number of factors might have come into play:

- that people wanted to be involved in research;
- that people wanted a 'voice', the chance to be listened to;
- that people wanted help with stress management, and;
- that I was known to some people in the company.

This is not to say that I knew all the practitioners; far from it. As Ball (1990) suggests that it is important to have an understanding of the researcher, I offer a few autobiographical details to set the context. I had been a probationer in this careers service a decade before, but left in 1989 to take up a management position in another careers service. Some, but very few people knew me from this role. Others knew me as a lecturer on the Diploma and Master's courses in careers guidance. For the practitioners who did know me, I was known primarily as a careers guidance professional rather than a researcher.

The sample size is 64 and this group of professionals comprises Sample X. A complete record of all the answers to all the questions on the questionnaire administered on January 9th, 1998 is included as an appendix (Appendix 3).

The original intention had been to use one sample, analyse the data and decide on the most appropriate research method for the next phase. The intention was not to match the samples in order to provide an exact comparison, but rather to see if the experience of this sample cast any fresh light on the earlier data.

As part of my own development as a researcher, I submitted a paper to an academic conference (Mulvey, 1998) as a result of which, in the autumn of 1998, I was invited to lecture to a group of students at a university in the North of England. Following Kreuger's advice (1994) on piggy-backing, I decided to administer the same questionnaire at the end of my session. The students were completely unknown to me, as I was to them; this group of guidance professionals comprises Sample Y. Again, a sample of the correspondence relating to my access

to Sample Y, including a letter thanking me for my input and summarising the evaluation it received is included as an appendix (Appendix 4). The course tutor summarised the students' evaluation:

“It certainly made a number of the students acknowledge the way in which they had viewed things has been overly simplistic and inclined to blame individual managers rather than looking more broadly at the process, function and responsibilities of delivering guidance in the broader sense.”

A full record of all the questionnaire responses from Sample Y is included as an appendix (Appendix 5).

3.4 Focus group method

A sense of the collegial was evident in the emergence of a professional voice from the data. Some respondents answered questions in the first person plural (e.g. We have worked hard) and referred to collective as well as personal targets. Others recorded overlapping answers, shading from the individual towards the profession as a whole. This led me to look for a method which would capture this collective experience; not to deny the individual voice, but to permit a wider tone and range than the solo voice could project. It was evident from the richness of the responses given on the questionnaires that practitioners had much to say. It might be possible to hear more of their experience if they were given an appropriate forum for discussion. Nearly all the respondents, in both Sample X and Sample Y, were working full-time, and had already expressed feeling pressure from existing work demands. The questionnaire had asked if they would be prepared to be involved in the second phase of the data collection; whilst recognising the many calls on their time, this gave them the chance of giving voice to their concerns; the chance to be listened to. The possible choices for mining this source of data seemed either to be individual follow-up interviews, or some form of group activity.

Arranging individual interviews for everyone in the sample would have presented a logistical challenge, given the constraints of time and location. For my part too, work pressures intensified as my part-time temporary lectureship became full-time and permanent, and the university department in which I work prepared for a QAHE Subject Review, scheduled for April 1999. Going out to meet people at their work place would be difficult to arrange; many in Sample X were based at some distance from me, and Sample Y at the other end of the country. Follow-up interviews began to seem an unrealistic option. Having decided to work in a grounded theory paradigm, where the data collection and analysis are closely interwoven, I wanted to retain full ownership of the entire research process; the next phase would have to be within the scope of what I could deliver alone. I was not prepared to delegate responsibility for data gathering to a fellow researcher or research assistant. Focus group is considered a research method congruent with phenomenon and grounded theory, allowing a measure of complexity and permitting the exploration of why people feel as they do (Kreuger, 1994). This method seemed to be appropriate to the research question and to fit with the constraints on researcher and respondents alike.

3.4.1 Is the focus group method appropriate for this research?

Whilst focus group techniques derived from practical application in the field of market research there is a growing literature on the place of focus group method in social science research (Krueger, 1994; Morgan & Spanish, 1994; Morgan, 1998). A number of considerations have their impact on the process of choosing among research methods. These range from the personal values and world view of the researcher, ethical issues of confidentiality and intrusion (May, 1993) through to practical constraints such as entry and access to a sample (Ball, 1990).

The decisive question is simply this: will this particular research method address this particular research question? My research question was about the lived experience of a group of professionals within a specific occupational area, and within a specific policy context. That experience was complex, multi-faceted, with some homogeneity within the group, given the professional identity, but predictably heterogeneity, given the individuals within the grouping. Wilson (1997) argues that the use of survey as a research method limits findings to 'what people do, not why' (p.212). Focus groups offer a different point of entry into understanding, a valuable addition to the phenomenological toolkit. Krueger (1994) sees the focus group as playing a part in inductive analysis, advocating their use where 'the topic of enquiry is complex' and goes on to point out that 'in public sector, focus groups are used to examine areas of concern that have considerable complexity, and are typically dependent on motivational forces' (1994, p.viii).

If the use of focus groups seemed to be a possible way to go deeper into understanding why these guidance professionals were acting in the way they had reported on the questionnaire, there still remained a question of validity. Could focus groups have a role to play in research at this level? For Krueger: 'Focus groups are valid if they are used carefully for a problem that is suitable for focus group inquiry' (1994, p.31). In this sense, the onus is on the researcher to ensure that the selected tool is appropriate for research task. Validity is not solely about what procedures are used, but the use of procedures is inherently and inexorably linked to the context. Morgan (1998) argues that: 'focus groups are useful where there is a gap between people, for example, between those who make decisions and those who implement them' (p.57). Some reservations and misunderstandings about focus group techniques in relation to validity in research remain. Bers (1989) neatly sums up the kind of denigration encountered: 'focus group research is soft and fuzzy, and anybody can do it' (p.261). Calling a skill 'soft' carries, if

unintentionally, the implication that it lies in opposition to a hard skill. The former is easily acquired, readily applied, the latter difficult to master, challenging to implement. The soft quality of the focus group technique seems to lie in its fluidity, uncertainty. Yet it is this fluidity which is challenging to the researcher; there is less control over the outcome of a focus group than over the outcome of a laboratory based trial or regulated experiment. Krueger also challenges the notion of focus groups as somehow unregulated, asserting that the focus group method is 'a systemic and disciplined approach that emphasises understandable rules and respect for other views', concluding that this method 'keeps us grounded in reality' (1994, p.239).

Flores and Alonso (1995) situate focus group method very firmly within phenomenology: 'we expect, when using the focus group technique, that there is no interest in generalizing the result to a population. Instead, focus groups show the range of opinions, attitudes and experiences in that population' (1995, p.97). They used focus group methods in their research on teacher response to changes in curriculum design and delivery, and found that 'focus groups are an important way of discovering what interviewees think about a concrete theme: those feelings, attitudes, reactions and doubts they have concerning it - in a situation in which they can contrast their opinions' (Flores & Alonso, 1995, p.84) and go on to challenge researchers in education to make greater use of focus groups, as they see this method 'offering enlightenment' (Flores & Alonso, 1995, p.86).

The data gathered from the questionnaire clearly indicated that a gap, apparently ever-widening, did exist between the policy makers and the guidance professionals responsible for delivery. These differences were most marked in the method used to measure the work done by the careers practitioners, and in the way specific client groups were targeted for careers interviews. If focus groups are helpful for making sense of gaps, they would certainly be appropriate for this research question. Another consideration was that focus groups would allow for genuine

exchange between the researcher and the participants; an exchange in real time, in real life rather more immediate and intimate than a questionnaire. Krueger (1994) warns that focus groups allows the respondents as much if not more influence on the data collection than the researcher. Given my commitment to listen to the professionals, and to let them tell their story, the argument for using focus group method was growing.

An argument against focus group technique is the inherent risk in allowing group dynamics to interplay with the gathering of data. Morgan (1998) reminds the researcher who opts for focus group that: 'it's *your* focus, but *their* group' (p.10, original emphasis). Although the researcher cannot know for certain the outcome of any given group there is no doubt that the orchestration of the group lies with the researcher. This is not participant observation, but a situation created by a researcher, in which that particular group gathers to discuss that particular issue in the hope that the researcher can make sense of the data generated.

3.4.2 What is a focus group?

Krueger offers a cumulative checklist in which he identifies six defining characteristics of focus groups:

- 1) People
- 2) assemble in a series of groups
- 3) possessing certain characteristics
- 4) provide data
- 5) of a qualitative nature
- 6) in a focused discussion.

(Krueger 1994, p.16)

These characteristics help to distinguish the focus group from the interview; the focus group expects interaction between group and moderator, and more importantly, interaction between members of the group itself. Given that the intra-

group interaction is desirable, consideration must be given to the optimum number for a focus group. Flores and Alonso (1995) make the point that all members of the group should be able to hear one another without having to shout, or have recourse to amplification. They see the optimum number falling somewhere between six as a minimum and ten as a maximum. Krueger (1998) concurs with these numbers, but makes the case for mini-groups, of at least three members, still offering potential. Part of the rationale for continuing with focus groups even where numbers are small is to consider the possible flow of communication along channels across and between all those involved in the group, both participants and facilitators. Flores and Alonso (1995) offer a formula for calculating the total number of possible channels of communication across a group: $n(n-1)/2$. For a group of ten people, the channels of communication would be: $10 \times 9 \div 2 = 45$. Of the focus group which I conducted, one comprised five professionals plus me, a total of six participants. Applying Flores and Alonso's formula, $10 \times 5 \div 2 = 25$ gives twenty five possible channels of communication. For the second group, comprising six participants plus me, a total of seven, the calculation is: $10 \times 6 \div 2 = 30$, that is 30 possible channels. Although the numbers involved might seem relatively small, the potential for the amount of data generated both in terms of words and exchanges across the group, is great. This calculation also brings home the complexity of the facilitator's task; the challenge is to attend to all possible communications, a more complex challenge than might at first be estimated from a head count of those present.

Krueger (1994) argues that qualitative research must be situationally responsive. It cannot be taken out of its context; the truth sought is to be found only within its context; to extrapolate is to distort. Given this commitment to the situation, and the ensuing constraints, the rigour of the focus group as a method derives from its situationality: 'the degree of rigor [*sic*] in the analysis is determined by the situation or problem at hand, as opposed to predetermined protocol' (Krueger,

1994, p.141). Bers (1989) also makes the case for validity, by arguing that focus group may be relatively new, but 'is based upon well developed principles of psychology, sociology and communication' (p.262). The use of focus group techniques seems to carry ambivalence, discernible in a set of apparent contradictions. This technique is derived in private sector, explicitly for commercial gain, yet is used in public sector for stakeholder feedback. Focus groups are clearly contrived, designed and orchestrated by a researcher who then sets the group off to explore at will, within the freedom of an emergent group dynamic. It can be perceived as an easy option, something anyone can do, and yet it requires a great deal of the researcher/moderator: highly developed communication skills, understanding of group process, sensitivity to individual voice within the group and an understanding of the issues implicit in the research. The focus group is neither naturalistic, unlike say participant observation, nor researcher-controlled in the same way as interviews. Such ambiguity about the form and function of focus groups can however allow for a powerful combination of useful elements of more familiar research methods. Morgan and Spanish offer this eloquent argument in support of focus group as a new tool for qualitative research:

'In essence, the strengths of focus groups come from a compromise between the strengths found in other qualitative methods. Like participant observation, they allow access to a process that qualitative researchers are often centrally interested in: interaction. Like in-depth interviewing, they allow access to the content that we are often interested in: the attitudes and experiences of our informants. As a compromise, focus groups are neither as strong as participant observation on the naturalistic observation of interaction, nor as strong as interviewing on the direct probing of informant knowledge, but they do a better job of combining these 2 goals than either of the other 2 techniques. We believe this is a useful

combination, and one which for some types of research questions, may represent the best of both worlds.'

(Morgan & Spanish, 1984, p.260)

To summarise, focus group techniques offer a rigorous method which demands much of the researcher, but permits the investigation of complexity and situationality. Given the nature of the research question, the arguments in favour of this method were compelling.

3.4.3 Is focus group appropriate for this researcher?

If the argument for using the focus group method as part of my research was convincing, there was still an issue for me as to whether or not I was capable of applying this technique. The literature (Krueger, 1984; Kreuger, 1998; Morgan, 1998; Keats, 2000) uses the term 'moderator' to denote the person who actually runs the group. This person may or may not also be the researcher. What is clear is that the moderator-researcher role is crucial in ensuring focus groups generate useful data. Wilson (1997) warns the researcher considering use of focus groups that: 'There is literally no place for a researcher to hide within a focus group: language, values, feelings and ability to interact with respondents soon become apparent - a unique challenge both personally and professionally for researcher' (p.222). Flores and Alonso, in describing effective moderators, offer a checklist of the essential characteristics needed: 'group process knowledge, sensitive, capable of listening, of clear expression, flexible, even expressive, lively and kind' (Flores & Alonso, 1995, p.90). Krueger (1994) also emphasises the role of the moderator and fitness for task: 'The moderator should be comfortable and familiar with the group process' (p.101) and Wilson (1997, p.213) agrees that prior, relevant experience is desirable.

Whilst this exhaustive list was initially daunting, on reflection, it was rather encouraging, as I felt there was evidence from my own professional training and

practice in guidance that I demonstrated all these characteristics. Part of my professional training as a guidance practitioner had been on group method and process including delivery of careers education programmes to groups of pupils and teachers. Much of my current teaching takes place in groups varying in size from 3 to 40. Indeed, some of my earlier teaching had been of management theory about working and managing groups, and I was joint author of a report evaluating careers education groupwork in schools (Bysshe *et al.*, 1997). Morgan (1998, p.48) asserts that the critical success factor for the moderator is their experience with the issues that the focus group has met to discuss, rather than with this research method. Focus groups would draw on my existing knowledge and experience, and allow me to transfer this prior learning to my developing role as researcher. Sharman and Webb (1988) emphasise 'bracketing' in the conduct of focus group research. By this, they mean that the researcher is aware of personal values and, by virtue of this awareness, is able to transcend the personal during the research process. They advocate journal-keeping as a method of raising and maintaining such awareness. A note in my personal learning diary, dated January 1999 reads: *'Prepared for focus groups and ran one in (location). Seemed to go ok - not that the method itself was inherently easy, but I had expertise from non-directive interviewing'*. A further note made in my learning diary wondered whether careers companies themselves might usefully consider the focus group in demonstrating the impact of their work with clients and other stakeholders.

3.4.4 Research phases

Morgan (1998) identifies four phases common both in academic research and in focus group, which unfold in sequence as the research progresses. These align respectively as: Generating research/Problem identification; Research Design/Planning; Data Collection/Implementation leading to the final stage of Data Analysis/Assessment. Within my research, the first two of Morgan's focus group phases, namely Problem Identification and Planning had been addressed

through the questionnaire administration. The phase of implementation/data collection had now been reached.

SECTION 4

THE FINDINGS

4.1 The questionnaire data: sample X

This section presents the findings from the data collected from the questionnaire administration. It follows the chronological sequence in which the data was collected, firstly from Sample X, then from Sample Y. As the next phase of data collection, using the focus group method was informed by the analysis of these data, the focus group findings are presented in a later sub-section.

4.1.1 Choice of careers company X

Two important factors influenced the choice of careers company X, in the South East of England, for the field research. Firstly, there had been no mergers or take-overs from other guidance providers, which meant that the management did not have to deal with harmonisation between companies but could focus on the transition from local authority to incorporation. The company was incorporated in February 1995 to provide careers services in a specified geographical area from April 1995 on an initial five year contract. As the Chief Executive explains in his foreward to the first annual report:

‘these services are provided under the terms of a five year contract with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, which the company secured as the successful outcome of a competitive bidding process. This development provided the managers and staff of the company with the opportunity to develop and improve existing services and to explore other ways in which the needs of its customers could be met.’

(Company X, 1996, p.2)

The company is a partnership between the County Council, which has the majority shareholding, and the local Training Enterprise Council, which has a 49% shareholding. In March 2000 the company secured preferred bidder status (DfEE, 1998e) and their contract was renewed.

The second influencing factor was that the researcher was known to some of the guidance professionals and so a level of trust and credibility (Murray and Lawrence, 2000) had already been established.

4.1.2 Summary of key points from the data analysis

These key points are presented here to provide a contextual overview of the presentation of the findings. There is compelling evidence to support the following claims:

- practitioners perceive their autonomy is under attack, and point to the effect of targets on the practitioner-client relationship;
- in managing to balance client need with numerical targets the quality of guidance is reduced and the relationship with the client skewed towards the practitioner's need to produce audit evidence of a 'claimable' guidance encounter;
- practitioners are dependent on productive relations with the schools if they are to meet targets;
- practitioners are working longer hours post-incorporation, often at the expense of their own professional development;
- two paradigms operate simultaneously within the company; the managerialist and the professional.

4.1.3 Questionnaire administration

The questionnaire was administered at the annual conference for all the careers guidance professionals working in Careers Company X in January 1998. Of the full establishment of 104 guidance professionals, 91 chose to attend the workshop sessions at which the questionnaire was administered; the sample represents 87% of guidance professionals employed in the organisation. In total, 64 completed questionnaires were returned, 50 of them by post. These 64 respondents comprise Sample X. The relatively high response rate (70%), coupled with frequent provision of detailed comments indicates that practitioners welcomed this opportunity to give voice to their experience. All the answers to each question were compiled to enable an overview of the answers given by the sample as a whole, whilst retaining the individual ownership of each respondent. Where possible, such as in the collation of statistical information, the answers were tabulated, again to give an overview of the whole sample and allow some comparison across sub sections of the sample. All the data from these questionnaires are attached as an appendix (Appendix 3). Verbatim quotations from the questionnaires are attributed to the coded respondent and are presented in quotation marks.

4.1.4 The current experience

The richest data from the sample is around the process of meeting targets and how that has affected the professional's delivery of guidance. Where the onus is on the practitioner to offer convincing evidence of an 'effective' (DfEE, 1995) guidance encounter, there is strong contestation of what constitutes effective and who should judge this. There is recognition amongst practitioners that freedom is relative; although the target culture has confined the parameters for freedom in organising

their work, they still have some room for manoeuvre. More importantly, there is the explicit recognition that freedom and responsibility are concomitant.

4.1.5 Terms of employment and experience

Questions 1 and 2 related to the terms and conditions of employment, to find out whether people were engaged on full or part-time, permanent or temporary contracts as these might be factors contributing to pressure in the workplace (Gibson *et al.*, 1994). The clear majority, 57 (89%), of guidance professionals in the sample are working full-time, and 61(95%) of the sample are engaged on permanent employment contracts. Figures in tables are rounded to the nearest whole number.

The next question asked about employment with this company:

Table 1: sample X, question 3

Q3	How long have you been in this job?		
	12 months or less	10	16%
	1 - 2 years	12	19%
	3 - 5 years	23	36%
	5 - 9 years	8	12%
	10 years or more	11	17%
	Total	64	100%

A total of 19 (29%) practitioners in the sample have been employed by this company for more than 5 years, that is to say, were employed when the company was a Local Education Authority careers service before the contracting-out process. Whilst this is a sizeable group, it is clearly in the minority, although subsequent reference is made by some respondents to this group as if they were in the majority.

The following question looked at professional qualifications:

Table 2: sample X, question 4

Q4	Do you hold a guidance qualification?		
	Expect to qualify	6	9%
	DCG Part 1 only	9	14%
	DCG Parts 1 & 2	47	73%
	NVQ Level 4	1	1.5%
	Other NVQ5 & Dip. in Management	1	1.5%
	Total	64	100%

The large majority, 47 (73%), hold the Diploma in Careers Guidance (DCG) Parts 1 and 2. Part One is awarded on successful completion of an approved taught programme, Part Two on satisfactory completion of one year's supervised practice, commonly known as the probationary year. A further 9 (14%) are Probationers, that is they are working through supervised practice towards Part Two. One respondent holds the National Vocational Qualification in Guidance at level 4. All professionals in these three categories are deemed to have the professional authority required to issue an action plan that is 'claimable' against the targets set for the careers company (DfEE, 1995). Six respondents (9%) "Expect to qualify" which means they are currently working toward the NVQ Guidance, and one respondent (1.5%) holds management qualifications, at NVQ5 and Diploma level.

Table 3: sample X, question 5

Q5	If you hold the DCG Parts 1 and 2, for how long have you been fully qualified?		
	1 - 2 years	21	45%
	3 - 5 years	11	23%
	6 - 10 years	7	15%
	11 - 15 years	5	11%
	16 - 20 years	2	4%
	21 + years	1	2%
	Total fully qualified	47	100%

Of those who are fully qualified the majority, 21 (45%), are relatively newly qualified, that is for up to two years. Given the timing of the contracting-out process of careers services, it follows that most of the guidance professionals in the sample have only ever worked in target-driven guidance, whereas those qualified for more than 5 years comprise a minority within the sample as a whole.

4.1.6 Work remit: education or labour market

Careers company X, for which all these respondents work, undertook a major re-organisation in the first year of incorporation, that is two years before this data collection (Company X Annual Report, 1997). This created a functional distinction between practitioners, working either in Education or Labour Market. The former do most of their work in schools and colleges; work which makes up the core contract with the DfEE and is therefore scrutinised against targets. The latter work with young people outside education, whether or not actively seeking employment or training. They have to work to company targets, and do deliver some ‘core contract’ work including visits to employers and opportunity providers (DfEE, 1995), but the target scrutiny is less intense. In response to Question 6: “Which category best fits

your job?” the majority, 35 (55%) put themselves in Education, with 8 (13%) self-reporting into the Labour Market category. 17 (27%) classified themselves as Manager/Team Leader and 4 (6%) reported that their job had elements of both Education and Labour Market, despite the company’s separation of the two functions.

4.1.7 The player-managers in sample X

Although 17 respondents (27%) in response to Question 6 classified themselves as managers, 21 respondents in the sample answered Question 16: “If you manage others, how would you say the introduction of targets has affected the way you manage?” The term ‘player-manager’ was used by 5 of the respondents to Question 16. The company and the professionals concerned would seem to draw a clear distinction between operational management and the senior level of strategic management (Pearce, 1994). In both of the subsequent focus groups conducted with professionals from this company, it was evident that there was a general understanding that, in common usage in the company, manager was only used to indicate somebody involved with strategic management. Operational managers, or Team Leaders, were perceived by their colleagues as practitioners who have a supervisory function in addition to their reduced caseload. Since contracting-out, it became possible in this company to be a manager at strategy level without holding a guidance qualification; before privatisation, the only career path to senior management level was to work up through the professional ranks from practitioner to specialist to manager. In the current set up, it would not be possible to be a Team Leader/Operational Manager without a guidance qualification, because part of that job is to deliver careers guidance. However, this means that a professional

qualification in careers guidance is no longer needed for the highest paid jobs in the company, a point made by one of the respondents after the questionnaire administration, although not recorded in writing.

4.1.8 Working to targets, post-incorporation and elsewhere

In response to Question 7: “In your current job, do you have to meet imposed targets, e.g. a certain number of action plans?” the vast majority, 61 (95%) confirmed that in their current job they are expected to meet imposed targets. Question 8 then asked: “What other kind of targets do you have to meet?” In presenting these responses, raw figures are given, as multiple answers were possible.

The DfEE (DfEE, 1995) lists performance indicators for ‘core contract’ including:

- percentage of Year 11 students at school who have received an action plan;
- percentage of 16-18 year olds in full-time education receiving an action plan;
- percentage of year 9 and 10 students at school attending a small group session;
- total placings into training opportunities;
- total contract costs per action plan.

Company X had produced a checklist for careers advisers to audit their action plan against the DfEE criteria to draw down the funding agreed; this 'claimable' action plan is the desired outcome of the interview. The Sample X checklist asserts that, for an action plan to be 'claimable', the careers adviser must have:

- Identified clear educational or occupational goal(s) for the client;
- Clearly identified the reasons for the client's choice;
- Commented on the realism and appropriateness of the client's goals.

61 respondents (95%) said that they had to meet targets in their current job, targets used here in the specific sense of the core contract output. Over half the sample have targets for delivering groupwork in school, set both by size of group and number of group sessions. Other school-based activities included working with parents, cited by 28 respondents, and negotiating with schools and colleges what services would be offered, indicated by 18 respondents. 17 respondents indicated they undertake individual interviews which fall outside the core contract, so are not claimable. One respondent specified that the interviews he does with Special Needs clients are not counted in the contract targets.

Other liaison included working with employers, mentioned 30 times, and placing young people into work or training, mentioned 10 times. Training activity, either for themselves, or for colleagues, came up 5 and 4 times respectively. An additional target, relating to internal company quality, was answering the phone within three rings, noted by 8 respondents.

4.1.9 Previous experience of targets

Comparing their experience within the careers company with previous experience outside of guidance (Question 9: “In previous jobs, including those outside guidance, did you have to meet targets?”) a sizeable majority, 35 (55%) confirmed that in previous jobs they had not been required to meet targets. Of the 29 (45%) who confirmed that they had had to meet targets only one qualified the response thus: *‘But they were sensible, meaningful and achievable’* (X 63).

In response to Question 10, which asked whether they would say they had freedom to organise their own work, 51 (80%) said Yes, the other 13 (20%) saying No. Whilst the majority therefore see themselves as having freedom to organise their work, 17 of those 51 in the majority qualified their answer. Overall, the tenor of these comments is guarded; there is freedom, but that freedom is limited. 3 respondents make reference to the school agenda, bringing in the dimension of negotiating the careers company agenda around the school programme and its priorities. 2 respondents see they have some discretion in how they achieve the targets: *'To a limited extent. There is a certain flexibility as long as the targets are met'* (X57). One respondent made the limit of their freedom very clear: *'As long as targets are met in accordance with projections in Business Plan'* (X58). This accords with Edwards' (1998) argument that when management focuses on outputs and evaluations, this: 'provides the possibility for a certain expansion of practitioner autonomy as there is less concern with how things are done, as long as goals are achieved effectively' (p.33). One respondent makes an astute comment, going beyond the current position to identify the origin of the constraints: *'But within very restricted guidelines, the prioritisation is predetermined'* (X63).

Flexibility, or the lack of it, is clearly an issue. With the Labour election victory in May 1997 there was some hope that performance indicators of this kind might be relaxed and re-framed to reflect the subtleties of the work undertaken. Not all commentators shared this optimism; Boyne (1998) argues that given the signs of ongoing bureaucracy under the new administration, there was a growing need for public service professionals to propose performance indicators to measure what they do, particularly in regard to added value. Subsequent indications of the

Government's new arrangements for measuring careers companies output (DfEE, 1998e) were welcomed as going some way to addressing this concern. Instead of targets attached to specified activities, a points tariff was introduced. This, in principle, would permit a global account of the work done by a careers company in response to local need as identified by the local careers guidance provider.

4.1.10 Freedom and responsibility

The unanimous response to Question 11: "In general, how much would you say you value the freedom to allocate your time?" was in the affirmative, with 55 (86%) quantifying their answer with comments such as: '*Very highly*' (X48); '*A lot*' (X13) and '*Greatly*' (X23). Some made the connection between professionalism and freedom: '*I value the autonomy which is expected of a professional*' (X4) and '*Value it very much as I am a professional*' (X52). Others identified freedom as a motivator: '*Highly valued - this is one of the main reasons which attracted me to this work*' (X53). Some identified policy changes affecting freedom: '*Very much although the amount of freedom is diminishing with the advent of government schemes - Bonus, etc, which expects you to interview a certain group*' (X36) and: '*I would value less constraints i.e. the freedom to make the action plan meet the individual client's needs rather than conform to government guidelines*' (X57). For at least one, the framework was welcome as it enhanced the possibility of being proactive: '*Essential element of the job, as it enables me to be proactive in planning new projects and managing work around customers*' (X56).

4.1.11 Targets as framework for autonomous practice

Question 12, “Do you view targets as a useful framework for organising your work?” sought to identify how practitioners managed targets in organising their work. A small proportion of 3 (5%) respondents in all found the question did not apply to them, and a further 25 (39%) said targets were not a useful framework. Whilst the majority, 36 (56%) of the sample did find targets a useful framework, this positive response was carefully modified:

- ‘Yes, but it would help if they were not so prescriptive.’* (X12)
- ‘Framework being the important word within context.’* (X29)
- ‘Yes, but only if they are realistic and can be flexible.’* (X39)
- ‘They can be, together with other management tools.’* (X55)
- ‘I try to ignore them and try and concentrate on providing good ceg*
[careers education and guidance].’ (X59)
- ‘Conceptually yes, but not as currently exercised.’* (X63)

4.1.12 Effect of targets on careers guidance

The avowed intention of the contracting-out policy was not to change the careers guidance delivered, but to revise the way guidance provision was organised (DfEE, 1996, p.43). Unintentional or not, the response to Question 13: ‘Do you feel that meeting targets has affected the way you deliver guidance?’ was unequivocal. 55 (86%) responded Yes, 6 (9%) replied that their guidance practice had not been affected by contracting-out and 3 (5%) deemed the question not applicable to them.

A further prompt question invited those who answered ‘Yes’ to describe the effects of meeting targets on the guidance they delivered. A number of themes emerged from the comments offered. These are presented broadly in order of recurrence.

- ***Practitioners perceive a reduction in the quality of guidance***

Some respondents found that there are external requirements which are having a discernible impact on their careers guidance practice. The requirements come from the DfEE, filtered through the Company X Head Office, exerting downward pressure on the practitioner, which directly impinges on the interview. In this response, although the practitioner starts by considering the use of information technology within the interview, the use of a laptop is merely symptomatic of external requirements:

‘Completing an action plan, using a computer during a time limited interview affects the quality of my interaction with the client- there is too much time spent inputting data that is not relevant to the guidance interview, but which we are told is necessary. The Requirements of the A.P. [action plan] in order to be claimable means that one has to get information out of the client whether or not it is relevant to the client’s situation or needs.’
(X2)

Other respondents on this sense of prescription: *‘It is now more prescriptive and less guidance with the need for Action Plans and targets’* (X4) and: *‘Interviews have to be strictly time regulated, therefore the quality and quantity is affected’* (X8). The difficulty lies in adhering to the requirements if professional judgement of client need is thereby compromised: *‘More difficult to respond to needs of clients who require more long term interactions/guidance’* (X3). This compromise is seen to diminish the quality: *‘Sometimes I suspect that the desire to meet targets results in clients getting a less than adequate service’* (X11) and to call in question the balance between quality and quantity: *‘More interviews in a day therefore (I think) quantity up, quality down- more interviews in a week i.e. interview overload. Tendency to see pupils as another one to tick off target rather than individual who needs guidance’*

(X5). One professional takes explicit responsibility for managing such imbalance: *'There is a conflict, between quality and quantity in relation to guidance work targets, but I try to ensure that the client always comes first and is not affected by the targets too much'* (X20).

This respondent acknowledges the impact of requirements on practice, and challenges the principle of managerial rather than professional judgement of the guidance process: *'I am concerned that as...I produce an action plan, I am preoccupied by the need to include certain criteria...so that the plan is "claimable". Its claimability seems, at bottom, an irrelevance in comparison to whether or not the client has been helped'* (X28).

- ***Pressure to service either audit demand or client need***

In terms of the balance between offering a client-centred service and satisfying the funding requirements, some practitioners discern a shift in their relations with clients in which clients are no longer their primary concern:

'I feel that the very inflexible rules from DfEE for the content of a claimable plan of action have a negative effect on my interaction. I am so conscious of checking all the points have been included that I find myself almost ignoring the client sometimes' (X7)

It is also noted *'...the use of the laptop does provide professional looking documentation but I believe it also intrudes into the interview'* (X51). There is the tension of competing demands: *'Service is centred around targets and is therefore not client-centred'* (X57), and: *'The need to tailor it [the interview] to Government requirements rather than individuals'* (X52). One respondent described a complete reversal in the client relationship: *'I no longer feel that I'm there for the client and their need. I feel I view clients now as walking Action Plans. It's no longer can I help the client it's can they help me!'* (X13), and another tries to suppress a

dismissive response to clients when their needs fall outside the parameters of claimability: *'It results in a pressure to 'Action Plan' everyone you see whether it is appropriate or not...Someone needing several sessions and perhaps a great deal of support might not count to anything towards your targets. I hope this is not apparent to the client but it is always on your mind'* (X16).

The image of a production line is first found in this sample: *'Interviews more focused as required criteria. Clients like a sausage machine'* (X47), and recurs in Sample Y.

- ***Moving away from client-centred practice***

As discussed above, a number of practitioners express concern about a discernible move away from client-centred practice; an understandable concern when guidance theory promotes client-centred practice. Three respondents are aware of this change in their practice and attribute it to target pressures. The emphasis in all three quotes has been added: *'...some Y.P.s [Young Persons] are not ready to have a POA [Plan of action] but targets mean that we have to be slightly directive if they have several career choices'* (X24); *'Have to be directive in interviews in order to find out the necessary points to make the action plan claimable'* (X37) and *'..being directive to find out necessary info; playing the game - doing things that are not essential for you or the client, but satisfy the target setters'* (X37). The framework of targets does not allow the practitioner to respond to the client in the way their professional judgement would suggest: *'Given that we work always with individuals, the framework of measurement of output created by targets is inevitably too rigid to allow us as practitioners to attend, as much as most of us would want to, to...the client...'* (X28)

- ***Time constraints***

Managing time within an interview is not a new task for practitioners, and yet in response to this question about the effect of targets on guidance, reference is made both to managing time within the interview itself and to the wider issue of managing practitioner time with client demand. This respondent links time limits with targets, and makes the point that whilst time has to be managed, the current rigidity of allocation does not allow for a practice which responds to individual client need: *'Although I am not against the principles of accountability the targets often mean that not enough time is given per interview. Some clients may need 30 minutes, others 60 minutes'* (X14). Part of the time pressure stems from the practitioner having to gather and record client data for management information within the interview time allocated: *'Time constraints. Having to produce Plans of Action to be issued immediately to the Y.P. [young person] means having to check spelling etc.'* (X24). There is a sense that the equation of time and money is heightened with an effect on the interview and other areas of careers guidance practice: *'More hurried. More aware of meeting demands of action plans. More conscious that each young person is worth real money...Less time to prepare. Less time for research. Less time for follow-up'* (X53). Other respondents also mentioned that research and their professional development is squeezed out: *'difficult to keep abreast of current trends and thinking'* (X36); *'Less time for personal development'* (X58); *'much less time for continuing professional development'* (X63).

- ***Welcoming or neutral about targets***

Not all the practitioners in Sample X were negative about the effect of targets on their practice. Some were ambivalent, and could see both advantage and

disadvantage in the target culture: *'It imposes an in-built agenda...which worries me. However I feel that demonstrable target achievement gives purpose, professionalism and avoids inaccurate reporting of guidance delivered'* (X42). Others were neutral: *'I do not feel the quality of guidance is affected in any way'* (X9). Others were positive: *'The targets themselves are not the problem and I think they help to stimulate activity and develop innovation'* (X51) and another respondent identified targets as a *'useful performance indicator'* (X23). One respondent, a Team Leader fully qualified for less than two years, was positive about working with targets:

'Although I have never worked in the system without targets, I feel that we have to be creative in the way we word action plans to ensure they are claimable, and therefore enabling me to meet targets. However, this does not impinge on the service I offer, as I am always willing to see a client again, to ensure they receive all the guidance they require.' (X56)

This assertion, that targets do not impinge, contrasts however with other colleagues in the same company who find: *'There is a constant need to keep a check on how time is spent...second/subsequent interactions are becoming increasingly rare'* (X7) and: *'Having to meet first action plan targets can prevent the adviser from allocating time to subsequent interviews for clients who may have such a need'* (X27). One respondent welcomed targets in the context of access into schools:

'On the positive front when negotiating with schools it has provided a lever on the amount of input into CEG (careers education and guidance) programmes and allows (guidance practitioners) a framework to negotiate...when faced with a careers co-ordinator who is against Careers Service.' (X60)

Such leverage is policy-dependent and therefore volatile; within 2 terms of this comment being made, practitioners had been directed to reduce their work in

schools, a live issue by the time of Sample Y data collection. Some respondents saw a possible benefit for clients, in that time limits foster client action: *'It has made me more creative in getting clients as well prepared as it's possible to do before they arrive for interview'* (X7, original emphasis); *'Much more reliance on their [clients'] own participation in the process of guidance'* (X50); *'the client is expected to have a certain amount of self- help'* (X38) and *'I do less work directly on behalf of clients, often referring on or leaving individuals to work on their own behalf'* (X58).

- ***Measuring work done***

The question of how to measure practitioner input was brought up by two practitioners in their response to Question 13: *'They [targets] have created a pressure to generate action plans...methods for counting some aspects of CEG [careers education and guidance] are dubious'* (X27) and: *'Although I am not against the principles of accountability the targets often mean that not enough time is given per interview..Instead of numbers it is far more important to monitor the value and quality of careers guidance'* (X14). Another respondent defended target audit with one caveat: *'If a range of activities are translated into an appropriate entitlement and the delivery by this entitlement is linked to a contract price this would not seem to me to be an unreasonable request from a purchaser'* (X55). These responses anticipated the next questionnaire item.

4.1.13 Measuring output

Question 14 asked: "Do you consider targets an appropriate tool to measure the work you do?" The majority, 33 (52%) answered No, and 28 (44%) answered Yes. 3 (5%) gave no answer. 6 of those answering Yes indicated that they would only accept targets as one of a number of appropriate measures. When prompted: "What

other measures would you welcome in addition to numerical targets?”, a range of indicators was suggested. As multiple answers were possible, raw figures are given indicating the number of times each performance indicator was mentioned in response to Question 14, and are tabulated below:

Table 4: sample X, question 14

Question 14 What other measures would you welcome In addition to numerical targets?	
Client Feedback	18
Quality of guidance	15
School Feedback	11
Tracking/added value	11
Peer/self assessment	6
Parent feedback	4
Mentor/staff appraisal	4

4.1.14 Effect on general morale

Question 15 asked: How would you say the introduction of targets has affected your motivation and general morale? The clear majority, 43 (67%) reported a detrimental effect on morale since the introduction of targets, with 13 (20%) reporting no effect. 6 (9%) reported finding a positive effect on morale, and 2 (3%) said the effect on morale had been both positive and detrimental. The open answers gave a flavour of the practitioner experience, and are presented in the following clusters.

- ***Feeling the strain***

Some respondents were clear that the effect on morale had been detrimental: ‘Generally I feel morale has gone down - all the managers are interested in is reaching the targets, and one is just a “number cruncher” not a person - or so it seems!’ (X9) and: ‘The stress factor has risen its ugly head. Pressure is now a way of life’ (X8). There was some indication of the emergence of a blame culture:

'However, stress on the job, covering your back takes its toll!!' (X60). Others were fearful about the security of their employment: 'The implementation has created a climate of fear; if targets are not met - jobs are on the line!' (X31); 'Told that if we don't reach the targets staff could lose their jobs' (X64) and 'The introduction of targets have seriously affected morale due to the manner in which they were introduced i.e. if you don't hit the targets there are implications and jobs are at risk!' (X44).

One respondent refers to the change in psychological contract, which leaves them with the *'feeling of being used. Inconsiderate management. I am employed as a professional able to make decisions, after analysis and evaluation, about how I might best deliver in the job given demands of clients and customers. Targets to a large extent take that away' (X18). Others describe their feelings in language indicative of strain turning into stress, with images of work being out of control (Fontana, 1989; Makin, 1991; Cooper, 1994; Newton & Hand, 1995) and a sense of helplessness to change the situation for the better: 'My motivation and general morale has gone down considerably...from time to time you can be left with a feeling of helplessness and lack of control of the situation' (X12) and 'One often feels that no matter what is achieved on a personal target, people are still demanding more' (X9). There is other use of Taylorist (Taylor, 1911) imagery: 'Motivation has been affected - it's now like working on a conveyor belt which is moving at a constant pace without you having a break' (X36) and: 'Feel more like an Action-Planning machine than a professional adviser' (X63). For one practitioner, the strain was too much:*

'Managers forget how difficult it can be in the field (many haven't practised for many years!) and keep putting pressure on advisers. Had period of 5

weeks off (never more than 5 days in a year before) due to physical stress which resulted in depression. I felt much better when I came back! This actually make [sic] me re-evaluate my [original emphasis] attitude to work.' (X 59)

Whilst time off was helpful for this practitioner, it increases pressure on colleagues: *'When I have achieved the target required I feel that I am then covering those who have underachieved'* (X38), though this sense of doing more than your fair share is tempered by empathy: *'I prefer accountability as I don't like carrying passengers, nevertheless motivation is hard to maintain... You are between the devil and the deep blue sea'* (X62). Covering for absent colleagues as an issue was also raised in the focus groups.

- ***Making sense of the situation***

One practitioner reported that targets had *'increased motivation'* (X25) in contrast with a colleague anticipating the increase to full caseload on completion of the probationary year: *'I don't feel I will be more motivated when I am given targets. I just feel I will be more pressurised'* (X17). A more common response from those who have only ever practised under targets, was phlegmatic: *'I have only worked in the Careers Service since the introduction of targets. I am not worried if I don't meet targets, if targets are not met by a Careers Service there is probably a good reason'* (X14); *'Targets existed before I joined the Careers Service therefore always been used to them'* (X21); *'I don't think they have (affected morale)'* (X11); and *'Has no effect - always worked with targets'* (X23). These respondents would seem to draw a clear distinction between newcomers and oldtimers (Lave, 1991) but also recognise that a community of practice itself is dynamic, newcomers become experienced practitioners both in ways that are similar to and in ways that are

different from the experience of the oldtimers. Some newcomers attribute difficulties with targets to length of practice, as encapsulated here: *'I believe a general view of current trainees is that the current target structure is more difficult for CGAs [Careers Guidance Advisers] with several years experience prior to privatisation'* (X15). Although earlier analysis showed that only 8 (17%) have been qualified for more than 11 years, and a further 7 (15%) have been qualified for more than 6 years. The sum of those practising for more than 5 years is 30% of the sample.

4.1.15 Managing others in relation to targets

Question 16 was directed at Team Leaders: "If you manage others, how would you say the introduction of targets has affected the way you manage?" 21 (33%) of the sample classified themselves as team leaders with operational responsibility. The description player-manager was used in 5 cases.

Whilst sympathetic, one respondent was clear nevertheless that the task is to ensure practitioners understand and respond to requests from Head Office: *'I still look at circumstances around numerous figures...and would support a non-achieving colleague. However, we have to produce the targets and I always ensure my team are aware of the importance to the company and their personal success within this company'* (X58). Another warns that: *'Targets are a big issue when it comes to managing a team. I think it would be very naive of CGAs [Careers Guidance Advisers] to underestimate the importance of targets'* (X54). There is, however, some discomfort with this role: *'Very difficult to keep asking them to do more when I know it's not possible'* (X59); *'I always seem to be asking them for figures'* (X53)

and: *'It is "challenging" to encourage people to take up "accountability" with regard to targets'* (X29).

The team leader role makes its own demands: *'Pressure put on me to be more of a policing manager'* (X47). Some Team Leaders assume the role of defender of the practitioner in dealing with senior management: *'Necessary to air problems with management, who often don't understand the detail'* (X62) and: *'More time is spent negotiating targets down with senior management - this to date has been successful'* (X60). One adopted a mediation role: *'Made them very stroppy, anti-management...am the peacemaker between staff and managers!'* (X59). Some of the player-managers take an explicitly supportive role, aligned more towards supervision in the clinical rather than managerial sense (Bimrose and Wilden, 1994): *'I find I have to help people maintain the quality of their guidance skills within this climate'* (X48) and: *'I try to be understanding and share ways and means of improving things for individuals. Do mentoring/coaching. Encourage personal development'* (X59).

Others find they are having to sustain their team members: *'...people need more [original emphasis] encouragement to keep motivation high'* (X3) and the team role: *'People get "hung up" on achieving individual targets and this can result in people working against each other rather than as a team. By concentrating on team targets rather than individual targets this helps'* (X49). The team emphasis can work well: *'Much more close monitoring of the team's work, creating a closer knit unit'* (X50).

This respondent argues that targets within careers work are part of a trend:

'As a team leader I would not expect this to change the way I managed people, because the vast majority of industries have targets, we have to learn

to live with it...We are living in a changing world of work. We as practitioners have to accept changes as well as other professionals and employees.' (X56)

There is an argument that targets have brought material benefits to careers companies:

'We have to recognise that the imposition of targets has gone hand in hand with substantial raising of money for the careers service...I believe that it is the balance [original emphasis] rather than the absolute quantity which has caused the challenge; the more flexible approach now being introduced should, over time, more closely match targets with need.' (X61)

This point can be challenged, in that the targets did not *per se* release more money, but that incorporation permitted the companies themselves to decide spending priorities. Nor did the '*more flexible approach*' live up to expectations, as the Sample Y and Focus Groups data will show.

All these approaches to team leadership in a target culture fail to hide an underlying paradox: '*It helps to monitor performance but I am conscious targets do place a great deal of stress on some people which does not help performance*' (X51), a paradox which current policy ignores.

4.1.16 A difficult balance

The final question invited an open answer: Question 17: "The Careers Service Performance Assessment Survey (DfEE, 1997a) reported that 'Some careers officers find it hard to balance client need and numerical targets'. How do you do it?"

As an open question, it gave the respondents time and space to revisit or elaborate on their previous answers. It is clear from the volume and detail of the responses, that this question afforded practitioners a valuable chance to have their say, but relatively

little of this data was new. Although a full transcript of all the answers is attached (Appendix 3) the findings presented here are limited to illumination of previous points raised or fresh insights.

- ***Reiteration of previous points***

Not surprisingly, the tension experienced in satisfying competing demands of funding requirements and guidance practice were revisited. One respondent brought in the issue of extended support for clients: *'More difficult to respond to needs of clients who require more long term interactions/guidance'* (X3), another gave a graphic illustration of the managerial response to a non-claimable action plan: *'If all points are not included payment isn't made and I'm likely to get the plan of action back from our 'Quality team' marked out of 10 with comments!'* (X7). There was an eloquent plea: *'We must measure what we value but we must also value what cannot be measured'* (X64). Although lengthy, this quote merits attention, for the practitioner's exposition of the professional dilemma:

'I am always aware of requirements for a claimable plan of action and not all interviews would naturally fulfil these requirements, although they would be good guidance interviews. I have had little difficulty meeting targets in numerical terms. The biggest problem for me is producing POAs [Plans of Action] which meet the very strict guidelines for claimable action plans from the Government Office. Because of targets I feel that if I spend 45-50 minutes with a client I need to be able to claim this work. It can be very difficult to establish rationale for example with clients where experiences are quite limited. On many occasions I would be much happier to make it an interview and not claim until a subsequent meeting when it is often easier to establish clear goals and very definite action.' (X58)

The underlying issue, clearly explained here, is that policy does not understand practice.

Turning to the audit procedures, there were some interesting insights into how practitioners managed the system: *'By trying to meet the client's need and then fiddling the figures afterwards e.g. getting a signature and doing Action Plans (claimable) afterwards. Tut, tut.'* (X13) and: *'Creative accounting!'* (X63). There was also evidence of the system not being managed *'...targets often balance out, more by luck than judgement'* (X19) and of the management system creating its own inefficiency: *'...inordinate amount of time spent on planning and frequently revising time management to meet targets'* (X37).

Whilst the importance of schools' co-operation in the achievement of targets had already been mentioned, a number of respondents were emphatic that targets can only be achieved with schools' help; *'there is strong pressure to meet these targets but careers advisers' ability to do so depends on the goodwill, co-operation and efficiency of third parties, i.e. schools, colleges and indeed young people themselves'* (X12); *'...by [ensuring a] good relationship with educational establishments'* (X6) and: *'By working hard - it is perfectly possible to achieve the targets set with co-operation of educational establishments and support of colleagues - no one can go sick!'* (X7). In one case, the careers adviser's agenda overrides the school's: *'Building good relations with staff in school - helps and influences negotiation to get numbers you need rather than what school needs'* (X32, emphasis added).

The issue of schools subordinating pupil need to careers adviser target fuels a hotly debated issue in Focus Group 2.

- ***Fresh insights; catch-up, values and new technology***

Still in response to Question 17: “The Careers Service Performance Assessment Survey (DfEE, 1997a) reported that: ‘Some careers officers find it hard to balance client need and numerical targets’. How do you do it?” some respondents brought fresh insight into their professional experience of contracted-out careers service delivery. Whilst reference had already been made to time pressures, the data for Question 17 include concrete examples of advisers working harder during work hours: *‘Trying to meet targets means cutting down the time which can be spent with individual clients. I therefore do not think that I do manage to meet all client needs other than by devoting rest time (breaks, lunchtimes) to clients’* (X12); *‘Try and manage my time efficiently through keeping up to date with admin and I.T. inputting during breaks and lunchtimes and after school’* (X20) and: *‘By working longer hours! i.e. giving the client the service they need/want etc and catching up afterwards’* (X51). Catching up can mean spending longer in the workplace: *‘By working longer hours e.g. using the interview time for the client and word processing the “perfect” plan of action later’* (X47) and: *‘Plan work as effectively as possible. Work late!’* (X29). Or it can mean taking work home: *‘Try to be extremely flexible and acknowledging that I will have to catch up on work at a later time’* (X39) and: *‘I am constantly playing “catch-up”, regularly work at home during evenings and weekends’* (X16). For some, it is a combination of all three: *‘By never having a spare minute, missing lunches and working at home’* (X53).

An important new theme was taking a moral stance, where practitioners squared up to company policy in defence of their practice: *‘If I need to spend my time at interview with yp [young person] say listening to details of some trauma I simply do*

not produce an action plan - I have never worried about failing to make my targets as if I do I feel I would be able to justify' (X60) and: 'I put client needs first; if as a result I fail to hit targets, too bad!' (X11). A final defence of client-centred practice is to confront the prevailing management paradigm: 'I do not meet numerical targets, nor I do I claim that I will be able to do so. I try to make it clear to managers, when this is the case, that the numerical targets are destructive' (X35).

Whilst none of these professionals makes explicit reference to ethical principles, it is clear that they are operating to a value system in which their professional judgement compels them to take a stand against a managerial value system driven by contract compliance.

The final new insight was into information technology (IT). Previously, reference had been made to the use of laptop computers during interviews, but this respondent explained what computers meant for the professional rather than the client. Another lengthy quote which outlines the problem and offers a solution:

'The targets themselves are not the problem and I think they help to stimulate activity and develop innovation. The problem lies with the collection and presentation of statistical information which is supported by an inadequate IT system. This results in having to use the computer at all times but because the software is unreliable, having to also produce manual statistics...I feel it would be better to...employ skilled clerical help for computer input.' (X51)

The problems of IT in this company were discussed at length in the focus groups.

As a final comment about the pressure of targets, this respondent offers thoughtful contextualisation:

‘ I am still very motivated by my clients. I am depressed that it has not, apparently, been possible so far to suggest to Government agencies that a more enlightened approach to control of careers guidance activities is necessary and can work. I feel, perhaps unjustifiably, there has been a failure/betrayal by our own professional bodies.’ (X28)

Interestingly, this is the only reference in all of the data to the professional bodies. As nobody else mentions the professional bodies either by name or in the abstract, are the professional bodies acting in privatisation as the dog that didn’t bark? This absence could prove a significant finding, because it raises the question of professional identity and representation. If careers guidance professionals feel their practice is under attack from policy which doesn’t understand what they are trying to do, where does the responsibility for articulating a defence of their profession fall?

4.2 The questionnaire data: sample Y

This section presents the findings from analysis of the data collected in the questionnaires administered to a group of 12 careers guidance professionals working in the North of England (Sample Y). A number of themes emerged from the data analysis, and these will be discussed in turn. Where relevant, the findings in this sample are compared and contrasted with the findings from the preceding sample, Sample X.

4.2.1 Summary of key points arising from the data

As with the Sample X analysis, key points are offered as an overview. For the most part, these corroborate the previous findings:

- managing the balance between client need and output measurement has compromised the quality of guidance and the relationship with the client;
- there is some creativity in accounting for work delivered;
- that the relationship between targets and rewards is not consistent.

4.2.2 Access to the sample

I presented a paper on my research at an academic conference in July 1998 (Mulvey, 1998). I was approached by a lecturer in the audience, who thought my research would be of interest to students on the MA in Careers Guidance at a university in the North of England. All the MA students were qualified careers advisers, with a minimum of two years' experience, working with careers companies across the north. I was invited to deliver a two-hour session on the Module 'Core Management Studies and Ethics' and took the opportunity to administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire administration took place at the end of the lecture, which preceded

lunch. Respondents, therefore, had the option of leaving the session and not completing the questionnaire (British Psychological Society, 1990). Of the fifteen students who attended the session, twelve returned completed questionnaires. All the answers to each question were compiled to enable an overview of the answers given by the sample as a whole, whilst retaining the individual ownership of each respondent. Where possible, such as in the collation of statistical information, the answers were tabulated, again to give an overview of the whole sample and allow some comparison across sub sections of the sample. All the data from these questionnaires are attached as an appendix (Appendix 5). The factual data from both Samples X and Y are combined for an overview, and are presented as an appendix (Appendix 6).

4.2.3 Characteristics of the sample

Questions 1 and 2 related to the terms and conditions of employment, to find out whether people were engaged on full or part-time, permanent or temporary contracts, as these might be factors in people feeling under pressure in the workplace. All 12 of guidance professionals in the sample are working full-time and are engaged on permanent employment contracts.

The tabulated responses to Question 3 (How long have you been in this job?) were as follows:

Q3	How long have you been in this job?	
	12 months or less	0
	1 - 2 years	3
	3 - 5 years	3
	5 - 9 years	4
	10 years or more	2

The next question looked at the professional qualifications held and asked for how long respondents had been qualified. As would be expected of careers guidance professionals undertaking Master's level study, the great majority, 10 respondents, hold both Part 1 and Part 2 of the Diploma in Careers Guidance. 2 respondents hold Part 1 of the Diploma, but have not completed their probationary year. One respondent holds a Management qualification, the National Vocational Qualification Level 4, in addition to their Careers Guidance qualification. Question 5 asked: 'If you hold the DCG Parts 1 and 2, how long have you been fully qualified?' Given the responses to the preceding question, only 10 respondents should have gone on to answer this question, but all 12 respondents in the sample did answer, perhaps assuming that completion of Part 1 of the Diploma was sufficient to meet the category 'fully qualified' in this question. The responses were:

Q5	If you hold the DCG Parts 1 and 2, how long have you been fully qualified?	
	1 - 2 years	4
	3 - 5 years	1
	6 - 10 years	5
	11 - 15 years	0
	16 - 20 years	2
	21 + years	0

The majority grouping is those qualified for between 6 and 10 years. Given the timing of the contracting-out process of careers services, it follows that most of the guidance professionals in this sample have worked in careers guidance before target-driven delivery, although 4 have only ever worked in a careers company with a target culture.

Question 6 asked respondents to assign themselves to one of three categories, whichever best fitted their job. The majority of 8 put themselves in the Education

category and only 1 into the Labour Market. 3 went into the Manager/Team Leader category. With only 1 exception out of the 12 respondents, all are therefore closely implicated in the achievement of targets, at the delivery or operational management level.

4.2.4 Targets

In response to Question 7, 10 confirmed that in their current job they are expected to meet imposed targets, such as a certain number of action plans resulting from individual careers guidance interviews. As with Sample X few practitioners are operating without feeling the effect of such targets. The following question (Question 8) invited the respondents to indicate any other targets they have to meet beyond those required for contract compliance with the DfEE core contract. The responses were similar to those in Sample X in that the same kinds of activity were presented. This indicates that the work undertaken was comparable even though all the respondents in Sample X work for the same careers company, whereas all the respondents in Sample Y work for different careers companies. In presenting the responses to Question 7, raw figures are given, as multiple answers were possible.

Six respondents indicated they undertake individual interviews which fall outside the core contract, so are not claimable. Two respondents specified careers guidance interviews undertaken with Special Needs clients. In addition respondents indicated the kind of tasks on which they also have to achieve a target, a number of which relate to work undertaken in schools, a key component of the DfEE core contract.

Exactly half the sample (6) have targets for delivering groupwork in school, set both by size of group and number of group sessions. Groupwork was also cited by 6 respondents, but not specifically in terms of school-based delivery. Working with

parents was cited by 4 respondents although this was not specifically related either to schools based or other work. Negotiating with schools as to what services would be offered was indicated by 2 respondents. Other liaison included working with employers, mentioned by 5 respondents. Project completion was included by 2 respondents, although there was no indication of the context or content of these projects.

In contrast to Sample X, nobody mentioned placing young people into work or training as a target. Staff development review for colleagues was mentioned twice. Intriguingly, no mention at all was made of personal training or development, despite all of the respondents being engaged in Master's level study at the time of the questionnaire.

4.2.5 Previous experience of targets

Comparing their experience within the careers company with previous experience outside of careers guidance just over half the sample, 7, confirmed that in previous jobs they had been required to meet targets and just under half, 5, had not been required to meet targets. In contrast to the responses to this question (Question 9) given by Sample X, nobody in Sample Y elaborated their Yes/No answer with any further comment or explanation.

In response to Question 10, which asked whether they would say they had freedom to organise their own work, 10 said Yes, and 2 answered No. This is comparable with the 80% affirmative response to this question in Sample X. Question 11 asked: 'In general, how much would you say you value the freedom to allocate your time?' Of the 10 'Yes' answers, 9 respondents clearly attached great importance to this freedom, adding comments such as: '*Very important*' (Y1); '*Very highly*' (Y2);

‘*Very important*’ (Y6); ‘*Highly value*’ (Y7); ‘*Value a great deal*’ (Y8); ‘*Very much*’ (Y9); ‘*Greatly*’ (Y10); ‘*Very highly*’ (Y11) and ‘*Highly*’ (Y12). Two of these respondents made the explicit link between autonomy and professionalism: ‘*Value a great deal - difference between a professional and a technician*’ (Y8) and: ‘*Very important to me as an individual and as a professional*’ (Y6, original emphasis). One made this same link between freedom and professionalism, but less explicitly: ‘*Very highly. It makes me feel valued and trusted to do the job*’ (Y11). One respondent was explicit about the effect of targets on time allocation in answering about freedom: ‘*Current pressures lead to being reactive not proactive*’ (Y5). One reflected on the paradox of targets and autonomy: ‘*Double edged sword; without targets I have to self-motivate*’ (Y4).

Question 12 sought to identify whether practitioners were able to make use of targets as a framework within which to organise their work. 4 said targets were not a useful framework, a proportion similar to that in Sample X. A much greater proportion, the majority of the sample, 8, did agree that they found targets a useful framework, but this positive response was carefully modified by nearly half of these respondents, with comments including: ‘*Fairly useful but too rigidly applied*’ (Y1); ‘*May be useful in strategically planning but not around dealing with individual clients*’ (Y6) and ‘*Yes, but not the only one*’ [performance indicator that is useful] (Y11).

4.2.6 Pressure to service either audit demand or client need

One of the interesting findings is the conflict between policy directives and the guidance practitioner's own professional judgement. Question 13 asked: 'Do you feel that meeting targets has affected the way you deliver guidance?' and all 12 respondents answered 'Yes'.

There was a subsequent prompt for those who answered Yes: 'If 'Yes', how would you describe the effects of targets on the way you deliver guidance?' Three of the practitioners responded in terms of having to accommodate both the funding requirements and the guidance imperative. The former has an external locus of control, the latter an internal locus. To accommodate the funding requirements, the practitioner must adhere to the DfEE criteria. It was common practice for practitioners to have the quality of the action plans they produced monitored by managers within the careers company. As outlined in the previous section, Company X had produced a checklist for careers advisers to audit their action plan against the DfEE criteria for acceptable action plans which would draw down the funding agreed in the core contract with the careers company; this 'claimable' action plan is the desired outcome of the interview. The Sample X checklist asserts that, for an action plan to be 'claimable', the careers adviser must have:

- identified clear educational or occupational goal(s) for the client
- clearly identified the reasons for the client's choice
- commented on the realism and appropriateness of the client's goals.

Such mechanisms, which check quality against managerial and audit criteria rather than against professional criteria for effective delivery, are symptomatic of the managerialist-professionalist tensions found elsewhere in the public sector (Power, 1997) and notably in Further Education (Randle and Brady, 1997; Gleeson and Shain, 1999). Some respondents echoed this tension to satisfy audit requirements which do not quite fit with best guidance practice: *'You work the interview to ensure*

all the criteria [quality] is [sic] met whether appropriate or not (Y6) and: *'Targets imposed define that for every guidance interview there should be a CAP [careers action plan] - very difficult if client undecided/no ideas/vocationally not ready- but feel the need to push to make a decision - technical rationality. Often feel paper-pushing, target meeting exercise'* (Y1). Roberts (1997) was eloquent in challenging this kind of assumption, arguing that: *'A consequence of young people's uncertain futures is that realistic guidance has to trade in possibilities rather than certainties or even probabilities'* (p.352). This runs counter to the underlying assumption of the funding mechanism, which requires a clear choice of occupational or vocational progression, supported by an appropriate rationale, which should sustain the client in achieving the stated career aim. The difficulty for some practitioners is that they are the ones expected to make sense of the client's uncertainty, the vagaries of the Labour Market and satisfy stringent funding requirements. All this in real time, with a real client: *'[action plan] Dominates interview - over rides their [client] needs and wants'* (Y3).

Policy seems to have a kind of presence within the interview space, and vies for the attention of the practitioner, even at the expense of the client. The practitioner seems to feel a genuine dichotomy between serving the paying client and the client in front of them. Another response shows the tension experienced by the practitioner in trying to satisfy the various demands discernible in the interview; demands which may even be diametrically opposed: *'I steer the agenda to fit the process required - though may not be on the agenda for the client I am interviewing'* (Y8). This respondent also feels that there are choices to be made about the direction the interview takes; and that by ensuring the funding requirements are met, the focus on

the actual client can be lost. This is not only an impression gained by these few individual practitioners feeling the effects of accountability pressure, but is corroborated by research undertaken by the local Training and Enterprise Council: *'Recent research carried out by our TEC [Training and Enterprise Council] has shown that client sometimes feel that their guidance needs are not always being met due to our needs'* (Y10).

A clear distinction is drawn between the process of the careers guidance interview itself, and the tangible outcome, the artefact that is the Action Plan:

'I have always worked in jobs where targets are integral to the job. However, there has always been a tangible link to the work I did and income generation, and not as an indicator of quality and amount of work done! The CS targets seem to be an attempt to justify the work we do and I feel they are very poor indicators of the work we do with clients. This leads to a feeling of being undervalued and de-skilled - the ap [action plan] is the product and outcome not impartial guidance to assist clients to move on and work towards reaching their goals.' (Y6)

In responding to a subsequent question (Q17) one practitioner makes a powerful statement about trading off the process of the careers interview against the action plan outcome: *'I have never felt that action plans are for the client - so quickly complete them and in a way feel they are the "price I have to pay" for interviewing the client'* (Y9). In the struggle to satisfy the god of guidance and mammon, the client becomes the sacrifice: *'Something has to give - usually client needs. Managers check your monthly stats, not the quality of guidance given - action plans too cumbersome a tool to measure the work we do'* (Y6).

- *The effect of targets*

In addition to the preceding responses to Question 13 ('Do you feel that meeting targets has affected the way you deliver guidance?') two respondents wrote of the effect of the targets from their own perspective. The first: '*Often feel paper-pushing, target meeting exercise*' (Y1). This description of the work undertaken with the client is not one that accords with the idea of professional work. There is a sense of bureaucracy gone mad; that the emphasis on producing the evidence to account for work undertaken to core contract has displaced the work itself. Careers guidance is lost in the quest for audit evidence. The second respondent gave a graphic description of their experience of working to set targets: '*Sausage machine. It's made me think more careful [sic] about the way I deliver things, as my time is so valuable and schools are aware of this. However, job satisfaction has diminished*' (Y5). Clearly a negative effect on morale.

One respondent was sanguine about targets, and somewhat dismissive of the effect of targets on colleagues: '*They are useful tool. It can be a pain when everyone gets overly uptight about them. Not a problem*' (Y4).

Respondent Y7, a Team Leader, pointed to the positive effect of targets on morale: '*Targets have helped to show individual contribution to company so helped with motivation. Supportive management so few problems with morale*'. Such positive views of the effect of targets were very much in the minority however: '*Quantity could mean delivering lots of crap - how does this help client?*' (Y4) and '*Less motivated as people who are crap at guidance can still meet their targets and be seen to be performing*' (Y2). The language used here is rather more robust than anything in Sample X. This may just be a question of personal style, or even of

regional variation. It might also be indicative of Sample Y responding to the questionnaire at a weekend, albeit a study weekend, in the neutral space that is their university, as opposed to the formal space of a company conference.

One final comment on quality uses a common enough metaphor: *'When we are appraised twice each year by team leaders we are measured by meeting our targets not on how we meet our targets - the 'extra' we put in. Feel the width, not the quality'* (Y8, emphasis added). Put in the geographical and historical context of a locality which traditionally produced and traded in cloth, the comments have a particular resonance.

- ***Reliance on schools to meet targets***

The importance of the practitioner's relationship with schools for meeting targets was a recurrent theme; those who were able to meet targets often admitted that good relations with schools helped. Practitioners make reference, as in Sample X and in the Focus Groups, to 'good' schools. By this, they mean specifically that the school appreciates the need for targets and is prepared to help achieve them; either by ensuring classroom release so that pupils can attend the guidance interview at the allocated time, or ensuring substitutes are available in school to cover no-shows when pupils are unexpectedly absent: *'To meet targets you need to be organised - this is a problem in a badly organised school and so leads to tension'* (Y4) and: *'Be organised - get on well with careers co-ordinator and school. This can give you the flexibility to meet client needs'* (Y4). Releasing individual pupils from timetabled lessons is relatively straightforward when compared with assembling the groups in

the configurations required to satisfy the core contract for groupwork in schools, a problem identified in a national evaluation of group work in schools (Bysshe *et al.*, 1997). One of the big problems has been the prescribed size of the groups being smaller than the average class. Reporting groupwork has given rise to a number of creative accounting practices, where for example, groupwork is delivered to a large group, but they are asked to do an activity in a sub-group in order to satisfy the letter of the contract compliance: *'Need to prioritise who will be seen, see in groups etc. Need to work closely with school staff'* (Y12).

Having secured the collaboration of the school to deliver both what the targets require, and what the school wants, a further hurdle is posed by policy decisions that reverse the status quo ante. By the time this questionnaire was administered to Sample Y, in November 1998, the re-focusing of the careers service had taken place. In this, careers companies were expected to focus greater effort in working with disaffected pupils, who may not even be attending school. As a result, work in school was cut. From the summer term of 1998, when guidance professionals had to convince teachers to release pupils from National Curriculum subjects to attend careers guidance activities, they returned in the autumn term, having to explain that the service will no longer be offered: *'Over reaching targets is a problem and it is hard to explain to school that last year 100% of Post 16 seen, this year 30% because of work with disaffected'* (Y12). Not that the pupil need has changed, nor that guidance theory has developed and moved on. The goal posts have been moved.

4.2.7 The effect of targets

In response to Question 15, which asks about motivation and morale,

there was some evidence of practitioners feeling left out of the target setting process, and the lack of ownership of the targets having a negative impact on morale and motivation. This respondent is clear that the targets do not show the actual work, which has been done. When work undertaken and delivered is not counted, it can seem not to be valued:

‘Because of the lack of "ownership" of targets because they are prescribed and because they do not reflect the actual work needed to be done with different clients and stakeholders (usually much greater) my morale has been adversely affected in the sense that I don’t feel my managers or DfEE place enough value (expressed in terms of time) on my work. My motivation is occasionally affected, especially relating to the company "culture" but I’m generally highly motivated as a person anyway.’ (Y3)

In this instance, the respondent acknowledges that this devaluation has sometimes affected motivation, but only temporarily. Another respondent agreed that morale had been adversely affected and was unlikely to improve, but felt motivation remained, despite, rather than because of the current management system: *‘Went through a very bad time, but now looks like targets may be relaxed and staff come up for a breather. Morale is low generally - particularly due to the management system and looks unlikely to change. Motivation remains in spite of, not because of the present system’ (Y5, emphasis added).* The following respondent echoes the sense both of being ‘undervalued’ and of being ‘deskilled’. This develops into a useful critique of the targets, arguing that the targets in themselves are not a reliable indicator of work done, nor an accurate reflection of work undertaken. Again, the point is made that the emphasis on the physical action plan obscures the point of careers guidance. Critically, this practitioner compares current experience of targets in a private organisation delivering to a public sector contract with prior experience

of working in a commercial context, where the targets set were real, in that targets connected actual work done and the income thus generated:

'I have always worked in jobs where targets are integral to the job. However, there has always been a tangible link to the work I did and income generation, and not as an indicator of quality and amount of work done! The CS targets seem to be an attempt to justify the work we do and I feel they are very poor indicators of the work we do with clients. This leads to a feeling of being undervalued and de-skilled - the ap [action plan] is the product and outcome not impartial guidance to assist clients to move on and work towards reaching their goals.' (Y6)

Taking a longer view, another respondent looks beyond the current challenge of the targets to the wider question of job security: *'Not the targets as such but the job security situation now during the privatisation phases was very concerning - also there is still the phrase "operational requirement" in use. What if you are not need [sic]/wanted because the goal posts have moved again?'* (Y9). There was one response that was not overtly negative in tone although neither was it resolutely positive: *'Interviews are more structured...however this results in more structured outputs'* (Y7). What is not clear from this quote is whether or not more structured outputs are desirable in terms of guidance. The only positive tone in Sample Y in response to this question about the effect of targets, was struck by a respondent who had not had any difficulty in meeting the targets set: *'I do not really place any great importance on them- but there again I have never failed to deliver! In previous job (sales) non- meeting of targets = no job'* (Y9). It is interesting to note that this respondent also makes reference to previous commercial experience in which targets had direct correlation with individual pay and conditions of employment: *'...my team leader accepts that some team members will overproduce and others under produce - it seems there are no rewards or sanctions for either and this can be a*

cause of resentment' (Y9). There is a sense of the arbitrary; that meeting the targets is an end in itself with no real role to play either in strategic management or careers guidance delivery.

4.2.8 Creative accounting

One respondent discloses the strategy devised in order to square the competing demands of claimable action plans as a result of a careers guidance interview with delivering what, in their professional judgement, the client needs: *'Put client need first. Work can often be skewed to fit targets. Made decision that although targets need to be met it is more important to look at what work needs to be done and then see how targets can fit into this'* (Y7). It is not very much further on from focusing on client need to the exclusion of competing considerations, to move to a position of presenting the work done in ways which then satisfy the audit requirement: *'I deliver the work, but I count it in "creative" ways'* (Y3). Another respondent relates a similar experience, although there is some ambiguity in this; it is not clear whether it was the practitioner who manipulated targets in order to demonstrate a better result, or whether this was done at the management level: *'Quantitative [sic] targets have often been manipulated to allow me to achieved [sic] better results'* (Y11).

This kind of double record keeping is, however, not necessarily a long term solution to the problem of satisfying competing demands: *'I have manipulated the targets but subsequently found that this just hid the real problems I was facing'* (Y11). And even if it were a long term solution, it begs the question; can unethical recording of work done be justified by claiming that adhering to one aspect of professional practice over-rides any other consideration? Does ethics apply only to careers guidance professionals, or extend to management practice?

4.2.9 Distance between practitioners and managers

Developing the points just raised about the quality of guidance being compromised by the policy demands, this respondent introduces the distance between managers and practitioners: *'Emphasis now placed on meeting targets above quality of guidance - maybe with managers being really unaware of the issues facing practitioners'* (Y5). Another practitioner acknowledges the usefulness of targets as a management tool, but challenges their usefulness for the client: *'May be useful in strategically planning but not around dealing with individual clients'* (Y6). The restricted focus on targets at the expense of best practice has led to a shift in management vision, which again places distance between those who manage themselves, as guidance professionals, and those who are charged with their management: *'It is disheartening as it seems too narrowly focussed and these targets don't show recognition of the impact made and the breadth of work. Managers now tend to focus on targets rather than look at the whole area of work as being important'* (Y11).

4.2.10 Working harder

As in Sample X, some practitioners disclosed they are having to work longer hours to 'balance client need and numerical targets' (Question 17). Of the 12 practitioners in the sample, 10 gave answers which indicated they found it difficult to achieve this balance. Two respondents made explicit reference to this in their answers: *'Also, to balance both, means that I have to undertake work at home in "personal time" in order to meet the numerical targets'* (Y1) and: *'Spend considerable additional time e.g. work weekend and evenings'* (Y3). Two more felt they make compromises in

quality to achieve this balance, to the detriment of client practice: *'With difficulty - something has to give - usually client needs'* (Y6) and: *'By working harder and if I'm honest by sometimes not giving the level of service I'd like to give'* (Y10). One respondent thought her practice had not changed: *'I never was willing to do everything for all clients only for the few who appeared to really need it'* (Y4), whereas another found that their guidance practices had had to change; *'With difficulty...have to look at group interviewing'* (Y5).

In contrast with Sample X, only one respondent (Y3) reported that developmental work had been squeezed out. This is hardly surprising, given that all in the sample were undertaking a part-time Master's course at the time of the data collection. Y10 responded on behalf of the practitioners s/he managed: *'Heavy commitments can make them feel under pressure - less time available for professional development'* (Y10).

4.2.11 The next phase of the research

The themes identified in the analysis from both Sample X and Sample Y formed the basis for further data collection in the focus groups, with the intention of going deeper into the issues identified (Kreuger, 1994). Morgan (1998) argues for the use of focus group methods 'when there is a gap between people, for example, between those who make decisions and those who implement them' (p. 57). The findings from the questionnaires indicated such a gap, confirming focus groups method as appropriate for the next phase of the research.

4.3 THE PRACTITIONER INTERVIEW

4.3.1 Constructing the research instrument; questions and vignettes

The analysis of the questionnaire data identified a number of issues that merited closer investigation. These were:

- What difference has the new points tariff made?
- What would be appropriate evidence of value added by the careers service?
- Dilemma resolution; how do practitioners make choices in their practice to satisfy competing demands?
- What values underpin the way practitioners resolve dilemmas?

The research instrument for the focus group method was structured to address these questions and comprised two elements. The first was a set of questions and prompts to engage the group in discussion; these were tested on colleagues and duly refined (Kreuger, 1998). The substantive questions used in the focus groups were:

- 1 Since the conference, the targets for action plans, groupwork and so on, have been dropped, and a points tariff introduced. How has that been?
- 2 The questionnaire found professionals dealt with targets by: working through lunch or at home; being very organised, getting school on board and seeing them as a management problem. I'd be interested in your comments on this.
- 3 One professional commented that there is no reward if targets *are* met, and no sanctions if they are *not* met. What do you think about this?
- 4 Some professionals think that targets/tariff are a crude measure of work done. Can you think of other ways of measuring your work?
- 5 Some professionals welcomed the effect of targets; what positive effect have *you* noticed?
- 6 If you had 2 minutes to talk to Government Office or the DfEE, what message would you want to get across to them?

The second element of the research instrument for the focus groups was the use of

vignette technique. Finch (1987) argues that ‘vignettes make possible one particular form of open-ended question which is situationally specific’ (p.106) and proposes the use of vignettes: ‘to explore a number of different elements which interact’ (p.109). She defines a vignette as ‘short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond’ (p.105). In her own research, she has found that respondents seem to find vignettes less personally threatening than direct questions, and are allowed ‘to articulate answers which are not the right thing to do’ (p.107). The vignette technique allows practitioners to think about dilemmas, drawing on their knowledge and understanding, without the fear of being judged and found wanting in ethical best practice. Finch (1987) charges the researcher to construct vignettes in which both the hypothetical characters and their fictional story are believable, and suggests 4 vignettes is probably the maximum a group can deal with in a session. Taking all this into account, I constructed the following vignettes, which were used in the mid stage of the focus group interviews:

- In one of your lunchtime drop-in sessions in school, a group of about 9 kids are all hoping to catch you. You have set up these sessions in response to the careers co-ordinator’s dismay at the reduced service you now offer in that school because of the refocusing agenda. The first pupil you take into the careers room to deal with presents all sorts of problems, and it is clear that this one client is likely to take up the whole hour. What do you do?
- You share a school with a colleague who is now on extended sick leave. The school is insistent that the Partnership agreement is met. This involves delivery of specific pieces of groupwork that you have never done, so have nothing ready prepared, and are scheduled to be delivered in the only time you have been able to carve out for catching up on your admin. How can you manage this?
- You have a practitioner in training on placement in one of your schools. She seems completely at home in school, and is very willing to get involved. You see this student deliver a really effective groupwork which went down very well; you are not surprised when you find out she is a qualified and experienced teacher now retraining for careers service. Could you offer this student some of the slots you have been asked to do; it would give her more experience and help you meet your targets?

These questions and vignettes, along with an introduction to the research and to focus group method, and the summary conclusions offered to the group as a reflection of the discussions, comprised the protocol (Lederman, 1990, p.122) for the focus group interviews.

4.3.2 Arranging access

Although Sample Y was excluded from this phase because those respondents were located too far away, the questionnaire administered to Sample X concluded with a brief explanation of the second phase of the research, and invited the respondents to indicate whether or not they would like to be invited to participate in focus groups. Of the 64 completed questionnaires received, 24 indicated their willingness to take part in focus groups. In percentage terms, 38% were willing; a sizeable proportion willing to be involved in an activity which would not immediately relate to their professional development, and which would not be visible in terms of work recorded. Lederman (1990) suggests that homogeneity is essential (p.118) but argues against members of a focus group knowing each other. Although all the members of the focus group worked for the same company, not all worked in the same office, so whilst some of the members of these focus groups did know each other, others did not. Flores and Alonso (1995, p.89) argue the need to achieve a homogeneous group in terms of those characteristics that affect the topic discussed, but that a heterogeneous group is desirable in those features that are not relevant. There is a recognition (Flores & Alonso, 1995, p.90) that previous research activity may provide a knowledge of the population from which the focus groups are drawn, without any overly negative effect on the outcome.

Having sorted the positive responses to the invitation to take part in the focus

groups, I approached the managers at two convenient office locations in Company X. Both managers were receptive to the research, and were happy to make a private meeting room available in the workplace during work time. They were also happy for practitioners to be involved in this research during work time. In this Careers company, it is standard office practice to identify one day a week when everybody works in the office, rather than going into schools or colleges, or out on visits. The impact of targets meant that it was increasingly common for practitioners to go into school even on this 'office' day in order to catch up, although administration or employer visits suffered in consequence. Having clarified which day this was, and eliminated dates on which office meetings had already been scheduled, I then wrote to all the guidance professionals based in the two host and several neighbouring offices, inviting them to attend one of two sessions. I also extended the invitation, making it clear that other practitioners were welcome to join the focus group at this stage, even if they had not been involved in the questionnaire. Sample correspondence relating to this access is attached as an appendix (Appendix 7).

4.3.3 Viable numbers

Only four practitioners opted for the first session. This seemed a disappointingly small number, but understandable, given the pressures under which practitioners were working. In terms of viable numbers for focus groups, four was acceptable. Flores and Alonso (1995) suggest three or four people as a minimum; Krueger (1994, p.7) is encouraging about the 'considerable potential' of smaller groups comprising five, six or seven people, although he distinguishes between these smaller groups and 'mini' focus groups, which need a minimum of three participants. Having decided therefore to go ahead with the four practitioners as a first, small, focus group, I arrived in time to set up the room and test the recording equipment, only to find that two people had left their apologies at the reception desk having been called away unexpectedly. Another did not show, though later faxed

her apologies and embarrassment at having simply forgotten, despite the follow-up reminder I had sent. The sole practitioner who did show up could not stay on and join the later group, and seemed disappointed at the prospect of missing out on her chance to have her say. I decided to go ahead with this non-group of one practitioner, and to use it primarily as a test of the topic guide questions (Krueger, 1998) and vignettes (Finch, 1987).

4.3.4 The practitioner interview

The interview took place in a private room in the workplace, and was recorded on audiotape. This approach satisfies Lederman's requirement that 'focus groups need to be conducted in an appropriate setting equipped with electronic recording equipment' (1990, p.127). The guidance practitioner was qualified and experienced, and at the time had recently opted to work in the Labour Market team. Whilst this meant that her client caseload comprised young unemployed people who attend the careers office for advice and guidance, the majority of her practice up to this recent move had been schools based. She also held a mentor function within this office, offering support to newly qualified practitioners working in their 'probationary' year. This gives her insight into the realities of current schools based practice. The practitioner holds a Master's degree in Guidance, with a management specialism.

4.3.5 Approaching the data

Krueger (1998, p.41) points out that in using focus groups, a common analysis error is to assume that what is most frequently mentioned is also the most important. There is clearly a temptation to keep tally of a concept or phrase, as this seems a useful activity, but ultimately this discloses nothing more than mere frequency. Noticing the patterns of usage is a useful way into the data, because it makes the researcher question why this concept or that response is used by more than one participant. Whilst there are computer programs available for qualitative data analysis which seemed attractive when confronted with the mass of data on the

audio tapes and transcripts, my decision was to eschew this path. Whilst arguing the case for greater use of focus group methods in qualitative research, both Bertrand *et al.* (1992) and Flores and Alonso (1995) warn the novice or infrequent researcher against embracing software for data analysis. Bertrand *et al.* acknowledge that 'qualitative analysis software can be a powerful tool for organizing the data produced...but they may not make the analysis process any easier' (p.207), concluding that 'they are probably not worth the effort required to master them...for the beginner' (Bertrand *et al.*, 1992, p.207). As the focus groups method was new to me, and not a method with which any of my immediate fellow researchers was familiar, I had a sense of testing new waters and decided to spend time on analysing the data rather than mastering the software. I was convinced that only by doing the analysis manually would I really get to grips with the data. I feared that to trust a computer program was to abnegate my responsibility for the task.

4.3.6 Analysing the data

I explained what I intended to do in the interview, and how I intended to use the data thus gathered. With her permission, I then recorded the entire interview on audio tape. The interview was later transcribed, and an edited transcript is attached as an appendix (Appendix 8). Verbatim quotes from the practitioner transcript are presented in italics. The inclusion of these quotes follows Lederman's best practice; 'verbatim cites provide the flavor [sic] of the [focus group] interviews. Thus the report provides the affective as well as the informational tone of the interview' (Lederman, 1990, p.125). Later on the same day of the interview, I listened to the tape in full, noting any particular emphasis or emotion. My training as a guidance practitioner was helpful particularly in noting non-verbal behaviour; I had articulated my observation of non-verbal behaviour during the interview, inviting the interviewee to expand or clarify, thus ensuring I had a record not only of what was said during the interview, but also what was not, initially, voiced. For example, I commented; 'You rolled your eyes a bit' which prompted the practitioner to expand

her answer. Interestingly, the practitioner, also trained in dealing with non-verbals, does the same to me when she asks; '*Why are you smiling?*' (p.11). Kreuger (1994) emphasises the role of the moderator in focus group interviewing is critical, so effective and sensitive communication skills are vital. Wilson (1997) warns the focus group interviewer that there is: 'literally no place for a researcher to hide within a focus group: language, values, feelings and ability to interact with respondents soon become apparent - a unique challenge both personally and professionally for researcher' (p.222).

Having first analysed the audiotape, the transcript was analysed later, and the two analyses compared. The data were revisited, reviewed and sifted for meanings. Flores and Alonso (1995, p.96) maintain: 'There is no standard process or model to carry out the analysis' although they identify a 'general process' (Flores & Alonso, (1995, p.96) of a series of tasks. These include repeated reading of and/or listening to the complete discourse, followed by grouping the data into themes or categories. These categories 'can be predetermined or can be generated from the data' (Flores and Alonso, 1995, p.96). Betrand *et al.* (1992) suggest margin coding (p.204) as an analytical tool; the analyst creates a set of codes that align with the original questions or to the themes identified in initial reading of the transcript. Using these codes, the researcher, armed with a fistful of coloured pens, marks the transcript against these categories. One advantage of this method is that 'it avoids some of the subjectivity inherent in the recall approach', but the disadvantage is 'the difficulty or managing and organizing in one's head all the different points on a given issue' (Betrand *et al.*, 1992, p.205). The margin coding technique was used for analysis of these data.

The practitioner interview comprises three main strands of thinking: management practices; careers guidance practice and dealing with stress. A summary of my analysis was sent to the practitioner for her approval; this summary is to be found at

the end of the transcript (Appendix 8). She raised no objections, and asked for neither amendment nor correction.

4.3.7 Management practices

The practitioner defines responsibility for managing on a range of levels, moving from the personal to the national. She is very clear that there needs to be accountability in guidance delivery, and takes responsibility for managing herself in terms of delivery: *'You have to have some kind of accountability'* (p.6). She challenges the position that delivering guidance is somehow exempt from accountability, by virtue of being one of the caring professions; *'you're not getting paid to be an altruistic, caring person, you're not, you're being paid to deliver'* (p.15). Nor does she accept that refusing to deal with targets is an acceptable stance to adopt: *'You're actually paid to do a job, at the end of the day, so, I couldn't say "you can stuff your target". This is what I actually believe'* (p.2). She expects management at the local office level to shoulder responsibility for achieving the collective targets. At the level of corporate management, even with the move away from targets to the points tariff, she sees some tension between what is expected in terms of delivery, and what is realistic: *'it's still very, very much target driven. Call it points, you can call it what you like, but we've still got the overall target and that still has to be met, and that's unrealistic in certain areas'* (p.1). She is clear about corporate responsibility: *'...it isn't your job to find an answer to that problem...it's the company's job...'* (p.11) and this clear separation of what lies within her gift and what lies beyond her reach affords her a sense of boundary and control.

This practitioner holds a Master's degree in Guidance, with a Management Education specialism. This background doubtless informs her analytical appraisal of strategic management within the company, in contrast with more emotional, perhaps less informed responses in other focus groups. Clearly, the context for this

practitioner interview contrasts with that for the focus groups proper. In an interview such as this, the respondent is more able to think through and articulate a considered analysis of the situation. Such analysis is not tempered by the reactions and responses of others, as would have been the case in a focus group. The focus groups also have an emotional momentum, when one utterance sparks a reaction which then ripples through the group, gathering momentum as it is developed. Such collective energy is simply not possible in an interview, although there is a clear sense of dialogue evident in the transcript (Appendix 8). The Sample Y analysis had shown high levels of cynicism about targets in relation to remuneration, with some respondents contrasting their experience of working in target-driven organisations before joining the careers service, notably in retail and in insurance. In those jobs, if targets were met, a bonus was paid. Equally, when targets were not met, there were clear financial penalties, in that actual take-home pay was less. This was included in the focus group questions, and when asked about her reactions to targets and remuneration, the interviewee replied:

‘That’s bad management isn’t it? Isn’t it??....You could take that further and say that the reason the targets were not met is bad management and I agree with that too. ‘Cos at the end of the day, you can go all the way up to the person who negotiates the [DfEE] contract and if the targets are unrealistic, then it’s their fault. Or, if the office fails to meet the targets...I won’t say fault,it’s someone’s responsibility to make sure that doesn’t happen. And if the targets are unrealistic, then someone down the line should come clean and say “OK these are unrealistic, what the hell are we going to do?” What strategies can we put in place to say that we’ve tried and what can we realistically do?’ (p.13)

This practitioner is acutely aware of the difficulty for the management of an organisation having to demonstrate both the work done and the effectiveness of the work whilst protecting the intention of the work itself. Her management education affords her the dual perspective, seeing the issue from both the practitioner

viewpoint and that of the manager: *'That's why I wavered in the middle, because I can see the rationale and I accept that. You have to have some kind of accountability. I wouldn't call it a target, but it has to be in some form or other for the organisation to be successful'* (p.6).

4.3.8 Guidance practice

The practitioner is very clear that the use of targets has affected how she delivers guidance, and that the effect is detrimental. She is aware that trying to achieve measurable outcomes and to deliver guidance well requires a conscious effort: *'I do actually believe that guidance should be client driven, and I hope never to go away from that..but I think you have to be quite experienced to be able to deal with that... I try not to be directive, but I think I would probably say that we [sic] were'* (p.2). She articulates the tension of working towards the client's agenda within a careers guidance interview, whilst simultaneously trying to produce a claimable action plan: *'We try to keep the guidance in there but it has a very, very directive framework...we have to follow the framework; we don't have any choice'* (p.4). She is clear that the targets have had a detrimental effect on the guidance delivered: *'I can see that there is an accountability, but the trade-off of that is that you've got a target which is meaningful and that the guidance is less than it should be. I don't accept that'* (p.5). The issue of ownership of the guidance process concerns her, in that the targets can sometimes mean that the plan of action is not negotiated between client and practitioner during the course of the interview, but imposed in order to satisfy the policy requirements: *'Because they've got to have this hard-core on paper, action plan, which may not be appropriate for their situation and it may be that they can't read it and right, you can talk about all the different medias you can put it in, but it's **your** outcome'* (p.9, original emphasis). She has concluded that the national policy shows little understanding of the guidance process, and appreciates the difficulty of agreeing a way of measuring effectiveness, whilst she acknowledges that it is difficult to find a solution:

'All I know for sure is that the targets are too crude. I agree with that. They're based on group psychology which is rubbish because we're talking about individuals; you can't judge them on that basis. They're based on all the things that we're taught as an adviser on the theory side based on a maturity that's the same for everyone and all of those things that put individuals in a mass it's not....You have to judge it on an individual basis and I'm not really sure there is a way of doing that, which is why they went for the target. I understand the theory behind that as well.' (p.6)

She is unequivocal in her assessment of the lack of understanding about guidance which seems to inform both Government policy and contract monitoring by the local government office: *'I don't think they [government office] know what we do. I don't think that has changed'* (p.17).

4.3.9 Managing pressures

This practitioner made several reference to stress, the first in response to my question 'Do you think there's been any positive effects within the target culture?' She replied: *'With regard to teamwork, I think it's very, very detrimental. People feel very, very stressed by it'* (p.5). She is clear that she has put boundaries in place to try to contain her work, so that she has a cut-off point, where she won't automatically cover for staff shortages in schools, for example:

'If you've got part responsibility for a school and someone is long-term sick, then you have to make it quite clear that you can't meet the other half...the company has to do something about it and they have to find someone else....it isn't your job to find an answer to that problem' (p.11)

She has a very clear rationale for not covering long term absence, which relates to her own health: *'We've all tried that and it doesn't work.....Because otherwise, as sure as anything, you'll be the next person off - with stress'* (p.12). She brings the stress issue up a little later on, in terms of how colleagues' absence due to stress has

a consequential effect on those still working. She talks about this as being an emotive subject, and it was clear that she felt strongly about it:

‘ You’ve got things like stress at work, when you have to weigh it up long-term, we all know that there are problems all round. There is a feeling from some people, let’s use the word emotional rather than anything, about the fact that they are working extremely hard when other people are ill. Stress is a very difficult thing both for the people who suffers it [sic] and for the people who have to deal with the ramifications.’ (p.15)

She also guards her home time, and simply will not take work home: *‘If you’re not like that then you will have stress ‘cos you will be doing more than you can cope with’* (p. 16) and she is emphatic that *‘working at home wouldn’t have anything to do with client quality. What people do at home is the administration. What you do at home has nothing to do with client quality’* (p.16). In considering the issue of stress, the practitioner goes on to recall feeling stressed and resisting guilt, and refers to the wider issue of doing what John (2000) calls emotional work:

‘The difficulty is... to not feel guilty, particularly in this profession because we’re all supposed to care so much. It’s like people say about the nurses and things like that - you’ve not got the right to go on strike, but of course they have they’ve got the same rights as everyone else. Because its a caring profession doesn’t mean to say that they don’t suffer from guilt and jealousy does it?’ (p. 16)

This interview clearly does not comprise a focus group but the decision to proceed with this data gathering was vindicated by two outcomes. Firstly, by the practitioner’s final comment. When I thanked her for ‘giving all this time’ she replied: *‘Good, I’ve enjoyed it’* (p.17). Secondly, by the quality of insight she brought to her consideration of the managerial and professional issues raised by privatisation.

4.4 Focus group 1

The first focus group took place immediately after the practitioner interview detailed in the preceding section. Having suggested a date and time likely to fit in with practitioners' movements, I had received seven acceptance slips. In the light of the poor turnout for the first group, I was apprehensive about securing a viable group, but was pleased to welcome a total of five people, with two more sending their apologies. All the correspondence relating to access to this and other focus groups is attached as an appendix (Appendix 7).

The focus group took place in a room in the workplace which, although private, was poorly lit and rather small for six people. It served the purpose as a space 'in which people sitting around a table can talk and keep visual contact with each other [which is] considered good enough to develop a discussion' (Flores & Alonso, 1995, p.93). The group comprised five qualified and experienced practitioners four of them women, one man. The sample was representative of the gender imbalance in the careers service, where 78% of delivery staff are women (DfEE, 2000c). Two of the women were team leaders with a reduced caseload. Within the group, they were not perceived as management and were treated as practising colleagues with some supervisory responsibility.

4.4.1 Running the focus group

I explained how the focus group interview connected with the questionnaire I had administered the year before, at their annual conference, and explained why the session was being recorded. I assured them that the recording was confidential, and that they would not be identified in any subsequent analysis. Recording interviews with clients plays an important part in careers guidance training, so practitioners are familiar with the technique. No objections were raised; indeed there was very little

apparent reaction to being recorded.

The first question was intended to be an ice-breaker, as suggested by Kreuger (1998). I asked them to think back over the last year, back to when they had attended their annual conference, and to identify a favourite memory. Their response was polite if unforthcoming, their demeanour somewhat baffled. Perhaps this was the wrong kind of ice breaker to have used; having set the scene for the group to consider their professional experience, asking about personal experience seemed incongruous. Wilson (1997, p.219) asserts that 'ice-breaking is not needed' where the focus group comprises professionals from the same discipline, and this seems a likely explanation of the group's reaction. The ice-breaker quickly gave way to my prepared questions, which elicited a readier response.

Kellener (1982) observes that not all members of a focus group will participate to the same extent, and suggests that the likely performance in a typical focus group is 40% of the group will be eager, another 40% are willing if the opportunity to contribute to the group arises, and 20% will be quiet. In this group, comprising five people, Kellener's observations were carried out to the letter. The edited transcript, attached as an appendix (Appendix 9) identifies who is speaking, but in order to preserve confidentiality participants have been given names in alphabetical order of contributing; the first speaker is Ann, the second Barbara and so on. Elaine was the quiet one, although she did join in as the group progressed, firstly by non-verbal agreeing, then by voicing her opinion, adding to what the previous speaker had said.

4.4.2 Analysis

I used the same technique as I had for analysing the Practitioner interview, that is I

listened to the tape in full later on the day of the recording, noting any non-verbal behaviour which might prove significant. To facilitate comparison with the practitioner interview, the analysis of the transcript used the following themes:

- Policy and the pace of changes;
- Working with schools;
- Management;
- Dealing with Pressure;
- Information Technology (IT);
- Guidance Practice;
- Sanctions and Rewards.

Information Technology was a new theme that emerged in this group. The final theme, in which the group discussed what happened when targets set by senior management were not met by practitioners was the issue which really engaged this group. There was more exchange between members and a greater spectrum of opinion on this than on any other issue discussed by the group.

4.4.3 Policy and change

To my surprise, there was overwhelming agreement that the introduction of the points tariff had not given any greater flexibility. This policy change had taken place in the year that had elapsed from the questionnaire administration (January 1998) to this focus group (February 1999). The policy had moved from the fixed numerical targets (DfEE, 1995) to a points tariff (DfEE, 1998e) which allocated points for a range of careers guidance activities. The contract agreed between the company and the DfEE, and monitored by the Local Government Office, expected a global points total to be delivered, but the tariff was intended to permit the flexibility needed by guidance companies to respond to local need. The group's immediate response to my question about the points tariff was: *'We haven't really noticed the effect of the points system. No difference whatsoever'* (Carol, p.1) and a second

group member agreed: *'We still have got our monthly profile, our school profile to do. Regards targets, we are still going for targets, but we can see in our office how the points system is working...No, it's not really made a great difference'* (Ann, p.1). David (p.2) saw no difference at all when asked explicitly if he had found that the points tariff rather than targets had made any difference. He replied: *'Mmmmm, I don't know any different really... I have always worked under targets.'* Barbara made the point that targets in themselves were not new, in that practitioners had always had a caseload, and were expected to interview everybody; the difference was that pre-privatisation targets did not exert pressure on the professional:

'We've always had targets really, I mean, going back to when I first started in the Careers Service, they weren't called targets but blanket interviewing, you know, you had to interview everybody, you still had this figure that you had to work towards to get through them, but we didn't call them targets, and there was no pressure - they weren't tied to money or income or anything like that then.' (Barbara, p.6)

There was also general agreement that the work they do has to be measured; there was no objection to the principle of accountability: *'I'm not against the accountability, but whether that's the way to do it I don't know'* (David, p.6). Indeed, Carol welcomed the clarity of the target framework *'...my feelings about the targets, I mean, going back to the early days of no targets at all, I think it has had a beneficial effect. I think it has made us more accountable, you know, has focused people into working with schools to..., sort of, achieve certain things'* (Carol, p.5). Elaine made her first contribution to the discussion, pointing out some benefits of the target culture in enhancing the perception of careers guidance professionals, although she also shares her reservations:

'I mean I think it has improved the quality in certain aspects, like the Action Plan. I mean it has greatly improved the process of how we come across as

professionals. I mean, I do have doubts about the Action Plan personally, but, I think the image we create by the action planning process is of benefit to us particularly.' (Elaine, p.6)

Whilst there was consensus about the need for accountability, there was debate as to whether this quantitative approach was an effective way of measuring their work.

4.4.4 Pace of change

The pace of change in policy and how priorities are changed from one year to the next was discussed. This focus group took place in the spring term, and the refocusing agenda was taking effect. This policy emphasised more work with disaffected young people, in preference to those attending school. Elaine talks about how her work has changed as a result:

'I've been given a list of four students today at school that I work in that I am now going to 'phone at home because they've been bad attenders at school so, rather than like last year, I might not have bothered and thought "Ooh well they've left school it doesn't really matter", you know this year - we're told we must follow these up now and see what's happening to them.'

(Elaine, p.11)

This prompted more discussion about the impact of the refocusing agenda which had been introduced earlier that academic year and its emphasis on the socially excluded. Elaine mentions careers work now being done in a womens' prison. Carol asks; *'we used to do that years ago didn't we?'* (p.11) to which Ann responds: *'It's been encouraged again, whereas it was allowed to be dropped 'cos it didn't seem that important, now all of a sudden, it is again'* (p.11). The apparent inconsistency when policy moves away from established position because it's not working, only to return to the status quo ante at a later date diminishes the trust professionals have in policy- makers.

4.4.5 Working in schools

The point that practitioners are dependent on effective working relations with their schools if they are to achieve targets is emphasised, as it was in the questionnaire data. Co-operation with the school for access to individual pupils is important, but even more critical is releasing pupils from lessons to take part in the group work required by the DfEE contract. There was some discussion about the role of the school in achieving targets. Derek asserts that: *'I personally think that they are achievable, the targets'* (p.4), but this is immediately countered by Carol: *'I think that's an issue; Derek works in two quite good schools...if you're working in a very difficult school, your achievements are going to be less'* (Carol, p.4). The group uses 'good' as a description of those schools which are prepared to accommodate practitioner needs, both in terms of delivering guidance activities which the school wants, but also in delivering to the small groups specified in this 'core' contract. A practitioner in a 'good' school is more likely to achieve targets, not because of their own particular efforts, but because of the school support. Those in schools which are not 'good' had greater difficulty in achieving targets, despite making just as much and possibly more effort to work effectively. In a later comment, it seems that Derek has taken on board the points made by Carol, when he acknowledges the role of the school in expediting targets: *'Er, because, as I say, it doesn't tell the true story, you know, you can have a school where it's really, really difficult to, you know, to get in your times or whatever group work...so, you know, it's no reflection necessarily on the Careers Guidance Adviser'*. Ann explains why her targets were not met one month, when the company need for targets simply did not fit with the school's priorities:

' my school was out on work experience in November, so...and then I'd have planned for that, but then the week before they went on work experience, I was told you can't interview this week because we don't want them to miss four weeks of lessons so consequently, I lost a whole week's interviews there,

so that's why it happened.' (Ann, p.5)

The group generally expressed concern that the target agenda had meant that sometimes work in school was much more driven by the company need to meet targets. This contrast with the school/company agreement on service delivery level to meet pupil need as assessed by careers practitioner and careers teacher working together:

'I think that there is...and has been... and hopefully it looks like this might be changing a bit...too much - it's been too rigid and that we're sort of forcing things on schools and the youngsters that they don't necessarily want, so, I think it's had a detrimental effect in that way and I think it would be much better if we could be more flexible in, sort of, negotiating work with school.'

(Carol, p.5)

Derek (p.8) describes the approach taken to shoehorn groupwork into the targets: *'if you've got a target of 30 [small groupwork, that is groups smaller than normal class size] and you've done 19 ...it's this sort of trying to split it into smaller groups to meet the figure'. Carol calls for: 'the return to more the idea of the menu approach...,than in a school where you go in and negotiate and then, you know, what suits us and does obviously, you know, meet some targets but also reflects the needs of the school rather than actually imposing on the school on what you've got to do' (p.15).*

4.4.6 Management

One practitioner did not feel that it was difficult to achieve the targets set, and in any case had developed a clear survival strategy by putting some distance between the targets set for him, and his achieving them: *'It is a management problem really...I don't sort of worry about them... so I just find that when I add them up... that they're there or thereabouts'* (Derek, p.4). In contrast, the two team leaders felt more

keenly their responsibility both for their own targets, and those of their team members: *'part of our responsibility is to monitor other peoples' achievement... so I wouldn't really say we can just sit back and say "these are somebody else's problem" because they're our problems'* (Carol, p.3). Given the issue of working effectively with schools to ensure access to pupils, Carol voiced the concern that *'we're operating in areas out of our control'* (Carol, p.8). There was a very strong feeling from this group that issues of delivery are dealt with by the office team, rather than at company level. There was clearly a sense of distance between the strategic managers in the company who interpreted the targets set in the contract for core work, and the professionals delivering the guidance services at street level. A distinction between 'them' and 'us' is articulated. A conciliatory tone suggested that if management would confer with practitioners, they would be willing to effect change: *'And the way things have changed without really consulting people who actually work in the field...If only they would have come and talked to us as to what they wanted in it in the first place, we would be able to sort of probably devise something between us that would be workable'* (Ann, p.17).

4.4.7 Dealing with pressure

There was general agreement that everybody in the group was working longer hours because of the targets, and that it was hard not to conform as this had become part of the company culture: *'I think certainly doing work at home and working through lunch times is increasing and certainly is becoming the norm for lots of staff now...and it's very hard to resist that now'* (Barbara, p.3). Some people put more hours in by working at home, and one of the team leaders, although working part-time, is succumbing to pressure to work longer: *'I try not to [work more hours] but I work part-time and I'm falling into the trap of working on my day off - that sort of thing'* (Barbara, p.3). Others, however, make a conscious effort not to take work home with them: *'As for working from home, I don't - alright, I might take ten*

minutes...I might prepare what to take tomorrow. I try to refuse to work from home' (Derek, p.4). Everybody in the group agreed that not taking a break but working through lunch hours, particularly on days spent working in schools, was expected: *'Well, we don't get a lunch hour in school. I'm lucky if I get ten minutes to snatch a sandwich or perhaps have a meal'* (Derek, p.4); *'I think definitely working through lunch hours'* (Carol, p.3). Barbara examines why the lunch hours have been eroded, and concludes: *'It's the spare capacity in your diary, the things like meetings and that has gone, so you're using your lunch time too...I'm arranging meetings in my lunch time now'* (p.4).

4.4.8 Information technology

The information technology system was identified by this focus group as a source of stress. This new system had been introduced with privatisation to collect management information required for contract compliance. Practitioners use laptop computers in schools; these hold occupational and labour market information, and are used both to gather client data and to produce a 'claimable' action plan. Practitioners however are expected to come back to the office on completion of their school day to upload data from their laptops into the system. This creates log-jams that have a direct impact on the practitioners: *'Only one person can do it at a time...you know, you have to queue, don't you, people have been here till seven o'clock, half past seven time to just up-load their laptop and that in itself causes a lot of stress'* (Carol, p.17). On tape, both Barbara and Derek are identifiable as being in agreement with Carol. There are other problems with the I.T. system, and these are seen as symptomatic of the distance between management and professional; 'they' do not understand the impact of the system on 'us'. There was seamless agreement about IT in this sequence (p.17):

'We need [inaudible] seriously to the I.T. 'cos if it doesn't work and it

doesn't do it there's a lot of colleagues that are really unlucky with their laptops. Well, we've all had problems with the system and you really haven't got the tools to do the job, have you?'

(Elaine)

'Mmmm yes, and the upgrading that has to be done in the middle of term instead of waiting for holidays when you're actually gonna not be able to use it in three days because you've got to bring it in one day and its gonna be upgraded the next day and you can't pick it up until the end of the following day so..'

(Ann)

'This causes real stress.'

(Carol)

4.4.9 Guidance practice

The practitioners felt that the use of targets has affected how they deliver guidance, because of the funding emphasis on outcome which does not take into consideration the underpinning process of career decision-making. The net effect of the changes is perceived to be detrimental to the client:

'We're sort of forcing things on schools and the youngsters that they don't necessarily want, so I think it's had a detrimental effect in that way...I think there has been a concentration on quantity rather than quality'

(Carol, p.5)

'...we're told you you've got to have one clear goal, and they might not have a clear goal, and then you either don't claim your Action Plan and don't get your money or else you have to make them say "Well, this would be my first choice if I had to make a choice" and they sometimes don't want to make that choice...I'd like to see it more open'

(Ann, p.15)

Barbara (p.16) makes a plea for professional autonomy, not as a protectionist measure, to acknowledge that individual clients cannot easily be classified, even if that makes accounting more straightforward;

'I think I'd like for them to accept our sort of professional judgement and our professional experience and leave it in our hands, rather than you know, being told what we have to do.....these are real people we're dealing with and, you know, you can't account for people in what they do and no matter how much you try and guide them or give them this or they're entitled to that you know you just can't account for people can you?'

(Barbara, p.16)

Derek, who volunteered early in the group that he has only ever worked in the privatised careers service, and who is not worried by targets, is nonetheless critical of the current restrictions on the Action Plan, because of the alienation of client from action: *'I think that there should be guidelines that, you know, we're taking them to the letter aren't we, otherwise the company doesn't get paid, I mean I accept that, but you know, personally I think it should be the client should own it, it should be done in your style and theirs together really...'* (Derek, p.18). Elaine makes an incisive point that the policy emphasis on pinning clients down to one clear goal in their action plan is compromising the trust between client and professional: *'I'd like to see it...reflecting that we are impartial advisers and I mean I don't think an Action Plan reflects that..that we are impartial'* (p.15).

4.4.10 Sanctions and rewards

The group was asked about sanctions and rewards, as this was an issue which came out of the Sample Y data. If a careers company does not achieve its targets, it does not secure full funding; this is portrayed as not getting paid. Where outputs are below target, offices and even individual practitioners are expected to make greater effort to make good the shortfall. This can however result in over achieving the

target, for which no additional funding is payable. The practitioner interview had brought up the issue of covering for colleagues on long term sickness leave, sometimes for stress related illness. I asked the group to focus on the question of rewarding achievement or penalising failure. This led to an animated discussion, the liveliest phase of the group. Derek had worked in a recruitment company prior to joining the careers service and had experienced performance related pay: *'That's what it definitely is in private recruitment and we're in a similar role, aren't we?'* (Derek, p.7). When asked to consider if it should be applied in the careers service, he is unsure: *'Mmmmm, it's not such a good thing for the Careers Service.....it's no reflection necessarily on the Careers Guidance Adviser...there's more to it'* (Derek, p.7). Others considered why it should be different in a careers company compared with a private recruitment agency: *'I just don't agree with financial sanctions, because I don't think we're operating on the levels of markets...it's not like a sales situation'* (Carol, p.8). Carol went on to think through this issue, and felt that the mechanism for redress should be through appraisal or disciplinary procedures. As a whole, the group was not easily able to suggest what would be appropriate measures of the work they had done. Tracking and dropout rates were two suggestions, and Elaine (p.10) neatly summed it up: *'I think, I mean we have to look for a combination of things really.'*

There was consensus that careers companies are different from the private sector and while numerical targets did not tell the whole story, devising appropriate measures would be complex. There was frustration with systems which met the needs of the audit process at the expense of the human needs of careers advisers. There was acknowledgement that things were different post- privatisation; both the guidance itself and the working conditions for professionals. There was evidence from this focus group data that these professionals felt themselves to be under some pressure.

A summary of this analysis was sent to each participant in the focus group: no amendments were requested.

4.5 Focus group 2

Having suggested a date and time likely to fit in with practitioners' movements, I had received eight acceptance slips. All the correspondence relating to access to this and all the other focus groups is included as an appendix (Appendix 7). In the event, six practitioners took part. I was warmly welcomed on my arrival at the office. Some of the group members had negotiated with the office manager to use her office, as this was a private and comfortable space. It became clear that although the office manager wanted to join in the focus group, most of the group did not want her to participate, and they took it upon themselves to explain to her that the group was exclusively for practitioners, which she seemed to take well, and withdrew amicably.

The group comprised six qualified and experienced practitioners, three women, three men; a gender balance unrepresentative of the organisation as a whole and careers services in general (DfEE, 2000c). One of the women was a team leader, with a reduced caseload and had additional responsibility for ensuring quality standards in the action plans, offering peer support to all the practitioners in that office as and when necessary. It was very clear that this focus group saw this Team Leader as 'one of us', but the office manager as 'one of them'. One male practitioner was a Trades Union representative.

4.5.1 Running the focus group

I set up the tape recording equipment as the group assembled, and was given helpful suggestions in siting the equipment for minimum intrusion and maximum pickup. The group seemed unfazed by the intention to record. As with the first focus group, I explained how this phase of data collection connected to the questionnaire they had filled in a year ago. I assured them that the recording was confidential, and that they would not be identified in subsequent analysis. In the light of my experience with the first focus group, where participants engaged immediately, I dropped the ice

breaker question and went straight into the focus group questions, which worked well, corroborating Wilson's report of respondents who 'spoke with candour...without ice breaking' (1997, p.219). Not all the vignettes were presented in the same way as previously, because the issues raised in the vignettes came up in the course of this focus group.

4.5.2 Analysis

I used the same technique as I had for the preceding recordings, that is, I listened to the tape in full later on the day of the recording, noting any non-verbal behaviour which might be significant. An edited transcript is attached as an appendix (Appendix 10). The transcript identifies who is speaking, but in order to preserve confidentiality, I have changed the names of the participants. Where references are made to members of the group, or other colleagues, these names too have been changed. For ease of comparison, I applied an analytical framework comprising some of the themes from Focus Group 1:

- Policy and the pace of changes;
- Working with schools;
- Management;
- Dealing with Pressure;
- Information Technology (IT);
- Guidance Practice.

This group actively engaged in debate about the effect of policy on the guidance process.

4.5.3 Policy and the pace of changes

As with the first focus group, the consensus was that the introduction of a points had had no effect on their day-to-day work:

'To be honest, life has gone on at the same sort of pace and I haven't even thought about the change in the way of working - it's just been head-down and go for it.' (Jackie, p.1)

'We've still very much got our targets very much in interviews, Action Plans, groups and we haven't had any flexibility really - to work within that - that's been described by the [...]so the flexibility and the thought was there,but it didn't materialise.' (Fiona, p.1)

'That's exactly what I was about to say, at ground level we've still got the same targets.' (George, p.1)

As the focus group interview gave them the chance to consider the introduction of the points tariff, there was a slight sense of disappointment, tempered with previous experience of change being heralded as beneficial, but not living up to that promise:

'It's like everything, when it's first introduced, I think it's always first introduced as a real opportunity...' (Fiona, p.1)

'I don't remember feeling surprised when it wasn't [a real opportunity] though..' (Scott, p.1)

One practitioner considered the introduction from the perspective of senior management, and identified advantages: *'The flexibility has been the way Head Office has been able to manipulate what figures have come in and in the end what they need..'* (Harriet, p.1). Another practitioner, the team leader, did identify a small but significant area of flexibility in the way groupwork in school is recorded: *'I would say the only bit of flexibility we have had... Sorry to be a positive one...is that we can now add the groups together over Year 9 and 10 and come out with a sum'* (Fiona, p.2). It is interesting that she prefaces her positive comments with a throwaway apology, perhaps aware that her contribution would not accord with the group's position. On further reflection however, she concludes: *'I think it is [pretty*

constrained], but I just wanted to say that that there's that little bit between Years 9 and 10' (Fiona, p.2).

The first focus group had made reference to the so-called 'refocusing' of the Careers service. Whilst everyone in the group was aware of the impending policy, there was uncertainty about the likely impact of the change: *'I don't think we know too much about the future' (Fiona, p.16)* and: *'I don't know how long it could have gone on for with people's goodwill, but everything's changing anyway' (Jackie, p.11)*. A recognition there of the psychological contract with the employer, where goodwill has, up to this point, been assumed by the company. The most likely anticipated change would be a direct impact on the careers guidance interview, the core business of the practitioners: *'We don't know what we're doing. Whereas I think we should be going to greater depths with certain groups and I know that's there, but we're probably gonna grab the bits of guidance and say work with these, work with them and doing little bits here and thereand the whole thing's gonna be diluted' (Harriet, p.10)*. Whilst recognising that refocusing would mean more in-depth guidance for those clients who have greater demonstrable need in terms of disaffection or social exclusion, there are concerns about the universality of provision: *'An actual guidance process, where you are there to follow up those that really need following up... there's going to be quite a bulk of people that actually slip through that net' (Harriet, p.10)* and: *'I don't know yet what's going to happen, but it sounds to me that an individual interview for everybody is not going to happen in the future and I think that's a real shame because lots of people who wouldn't actually qualify for the 'hard to help', you know, title, but they need help' (Fiona, p.16).*

Although the actual changes coming their way were relatively intangible at the time of this focus group, there is an awareness that things will change, and new demands

will be made. The goal post analogy is employed as in the first group and in the questionnaire responses; *'...suddenly the goal posts are moving completely and that's a bit sad really. However, if you actually think about pressures on us, suddenly now the pressures of completely switching the way you work is going to be far more intense'* (Jackie, p.16). Jackie concludes that the end result of the refocusing agenda will be to undermine the guidance process completely, although she predicts that rather more will be lost than the policy change intends: *'And a couple of years down the road, they'll probably find they've chucked the baby out with the bathwater'* (Jackie, p.10). This reinforces the point made in the first focus group that while a practice can be dismantled by policy directive, it can in turn be reinvented as new policy.

4.5.4 Working with schools

Consistent with the focus group and questionnaire data, this group stresses the importance of effective working relations with schools. The issue of gaining access to the right number and size of groups in schools for contract compliance was discussed. This office, unique in the company, has developed a collective approach to delivering groupwork in school, which they refer to as the 'Road-Show'. Jackie talked about this with evident pride and satisfaction, particularly at the collegial aspect of this delivery:

' I think particularly our 'Road-Show' programme has been a very good team-working activity. We design it, we evaluate it every year, we fine tune it and then we deliver it as teams and it wouldn't work if we didn't work as a team. When you think of how often you're isolated, not quite part of the school, just on your own...winkling your way through...actually going in with

a group of other people to have a little crack with... and doing something together is nice.' (Jackie, p.9)

Scott, the Trades Union representative, joined the discussion with a particular incident in his school. Scott had had to persuade his school to take pupils off timetable to deliver the Road-Show on a particular date so that the company could satisfy audit requirements:

'I just wanted to say, the most embarrassing moment I've ever had..... is being in the staff room, speaking to a careers co-ordinator, and saying "Well look I've spoken to my manager, and we really need these targets" and the careers co-ordinator shouting across the staff-room to the Head of Year, "They need this for their targets", and if there was a hole there I would have fallen into it. I'm trying to say "Well it's not just our targets actually, it's a good idea" but I had to put pressure on the school to do it so that it fell within this target area.' (Scott, p.8)

A lively discussion ensued, with some forthright views expressed about the company agenda versus the school agenda; clear evidence of managerial/professional tension. The outcome of the discussion was that this particular incident was exceptional only in the degree of pressure experienced. All practitioners acknowledged that they had always picked their way through the complexity of the work in schools, a mixed agenda which includes: careers education needs; timetable constraints; logistical problems including classroom space; the crowded curriculum; teachers refusing release for careers activities and most recently, the practitioners' need to meet company targets within a specified timescale. This was a phase in the focus group where members were clearly arguing for and against their personal interpretation of a particular situation. The group reached a consensus only through a process of closely fought debate, as this sequence shows:

'But I think that in general terms, there have been a great majority of cases where we don't actually say to schools, "We need to do these activities because we've got targets to meet". In general, we're doing it because the schools want this and I would like to say that very strongly.'

(Jackie, p.8)

'This is an exceptional case, I accept that.'

(Scott, p.8)

'...with one eye on targets as well.'

(George, p.8)

'But that's what we do privately in most cases.'

(Jackie, p.8)

'We don't actually say "We need this, we need that".'

(George, p.8)

There was an echo of the concern expressed in the first focus group that target pressure rather than guidance practice drives the work that is actually done: *'I think the problem then can be that you look at the target rather than do the job...I think it's back to front'* (Terry, p.7). The practitioner is caught in the middle. When these demands openly compete, it is the professional who has to mediate between company and school to reconcile the conflict, whether or not their professional judgement fits with the company line.

4.5.5 Management

The comments about managing and being managed align to three spheres of management: the personal; the peer/collegial and the Local/Head Office. Some participants took targets in their stride; they were set, they were achievable, it was simply a question of application: *'I just thought I've got x amount of students to see - so I just got on with that'* (Terry, p.2). One practitioner later reflected on her experience of target culture, and was quite pleased with the freedom she felt had come with her responsibilities. This concurs with some comments in the questionnaire data, which supported Edwards' (1998) argument that there is room for autonomy within targets: *'I rather like the fact that if I get done to a sufficient standard what I'm asked to do, I've got freedom to sort it out myself'* (Jackie, p.9).

This group of practitioners demonstrated a strong collegial base for their work, which in turn underpins quality assurance. As in the first focus group, the practitioners' action plans are sampled to ensure that they are 'claimable'. Elsewhere in the company, this quality appraisal relates to the managerial rather than the professional paradigm. It is clear from the following exchange that for this group, the principle underlying sampling is peer coaching and professional development. One of the practitioners, and the team leader responsible for quality assurance agree that her approach is supportive. The practitioner actually minimises the team leader's management role in this function: *'It's more in the spirit of peer even though you're like a management [sic]'* (Terry, p.7, emphasis added). The team leader herself says: *'I'm the team leader for the education team, it's sort of peer I would say, rather than management but I am given the responsibility'* (Fiona, p.7).

There is a shared value that this office self-regulates as a matter of pride rather than in response to pressure from Head Office: *'We've got pride in ourselves because we achieve our target where others don't'* (Jackie, p.9) and *'In this office, there would be a sanction if you didn't meet your targets. It wouldn't be like a formal one, everyone sort of works together and you would be the odd person out'* (George, p.11). This collective response to meeting targets effectively dealt with the issues of sanctions and rewards which were discussed at greater length in the previous group. The approach was collective, and great pride was taken in the target achievement by professionals in this office. There was no management pressure in covering for absence, but a collective responsibility; nobody is directed, everybody simply does extra. That is not to say there is no pressure brought to bear, but that the effect of the pressure is not detrimental as the peer support lessens the burden of targets. The professionals accept it as the responsibility which goes along with freedom. As with

the first focus group, managers are used to fill operational gaps, but seem to be more willing than in the first group. Harriet makes the point that managers can only deliver if they are professionally qualified, which is not always the case: *'But that causes an issue as to whether managers are qualified'* (Harriet, p.13).

Head Office is identified as the source of pressure, specifically in tight requirements for claimable Action Plans, even where practitioners understand that the national policy has been to relax these requirements. There is general agreement on this:

'...the constant tightening up of the requirements of the Action Plan to the stage where people feel that they have to do a two-page Action Plan - typing up two pages - and it has also to fit in boxes and...I think that's exacerbated this problem.' (Scott)

Where do you see that tightening up coming from? [Rachel Mulvey]

Head office. Head...Head Office rather than.. (general agreement)

'Yeah, Head Office'. (Scott)

'Because it's actually loosened up slightly - and I think Head Office has realised and slightly relaxed it a little bit soI think it did come from Head Office'. (Harriet, p.5)

4.5.6 Dealing with pressure

When asked: 'How do you manage to meet your targets?' the immediate response was general and heartfelt laughter and this response: *'By working, very, very, very hard .. and planning it carefully'* (Jackie, p.3). This led to a discussion around hours worked which was, at times, quite heated. Whilst there was general agreement that people now had to work longer hours, usually by working through lunch breaks, perhaps staying later at the office or by working at home, there was some dispute as

to whether these extra hours were entirely necessary. Harriet felt that sometimes people choose to work longer than they needed to:

‘But putting a perspective on this working from home now Rachel, I’ve come across a lot of people, just out of their probationary year, that are so hung up about getting the Action Plan absolutely perfect, that no matter that they’ve got ample time they’d still prefer and choose to do it at home, so I do actually think there’s a lot of self-made pressure...’.

(Harriet, p.3)

She went on, however, to conclude that this might be to do with the personality of the individual practitioner, combined with the individual managers *‘who are perhaps being a little more ‘picky’ about the way they are monitoring Action Plans, so I think it’s a combination of factors there’* (Harriet, p.3). Scott, the Trades Union representative, was vehement that this was not a matter of personality or personal choice, but the demands of the job:

‘Can we spell out here, it was an issue that we talked about in the UNISON stewards and every steward said there were people in their office, and probably most people, who were doing lunch times, staying after work late and even coming in at weekends and taking work home. And that was unanimous - without exception - everybody said that’.

(Scott, p.3)

Harriet was in agreement with this as a general statement but still felt that in some cases it was more to do with personal choice. It was clear however, that most of those present agreed that, since the introduction of targets, everybody has worked longer hours, and this was now expected as a matter of course.

4.5.7 Information technology

This seemed to be less problematic than with the first focus group. There were the same problems: uploading from laptop to the office system; adapting to constant

upgrades and little dedicated time for training or development, but the IT system in general, and its application in practice did not seem to cause any significant stress. One practitioner complained that she was not able to use a laptop for her interviews in the local Further Education college: *'I would actually desperately like to be able to. It's a pain. I've got to come back and then I've got to put details on the computer'* (Fiona, p.13). Others in the group saw other advantages of laptops; that they have computer programs which enhance or even replace provision in schools: *'where school's facilities aren't wonderful, we've got this instead'* (Jackie, p.13); and that having a laptop gives the practitioner some standing with school-aged clients: *'I think credibility - with the computer being there- with this generation'* (Harriet, p.13). The discussion about the skills needed for effective use of I.T. were discussed. Skills here were not merely the ability to word process or to type fast, although those are useful, but the ability to manipulate the technology to facilitate rather than impede the interview process: *'Well you've got to be prepared to make a 'plonker' of yourself in front of the client, and once you get over that hurdle...dividing your attention between a client and a computer'* (Jackie, p.4). The group was also able to identify advantages of using the laptop effectively within the interview: *'It closes the interview quite nicely'* (Terry, p.4).

There is general agreement that the quality of action plans has improved since privatisation, in that there is an agreed standard in force across the company. The action plan is now treated as a product that goes out into the public domain, but there were reservations about this metamorphosis of the action plan from something which is crafted for the client to something which is used as a marketing tool.

4.5.8 Guidance practice

The discussion on Information Technology turned to the impact of both IT and targets on the careers guidance interview. Scott warns of the confusion between outcome and process in careers guidance: *'What you're saying is that the Action Plan, from your point of view, might be better but not necessarily the interview'* (Scott, p.6). Picking up on the point Jackie made about dividing your attention between the computer and the client, others identified the danger of focusing on IT at the expense of the client: *'Except that if you've got somebody who takes an awful lot of time or who isn't good at including the client, it can actually destroy a lot of the good work that's gone on in the interview before. I've sat there and seen the youngsters, sort of being, shut down, from the process because it's taking so long'* (Harriet, p.5). Another problem was the lack of time for clients after their initial interview. If the action plan is claimable, in terms of identifying a clear career idea, supported by a rationale, it is difficult then to justify revisiting these career ideas: *'I think you don't always have time for the clients...it's the follow up for those who really need it.. alright once, but to follow them up 2 or 3 times'* (Harriet, p.10). This clearly sets professional judgement against managerial judgement. Another member of the group also compares her current and previous practice, concluding that current practice is diminished: *'I often get the feeling that in the olden days, I would have had a bit more time to spend on certain clients ...like I used to'* (Fiona, p.10). Fiona also reiterates the point made in questionnaire data that the targets limit the work she can do with the client, putting the onus on the client to do work after the interview: *'I think you do make the client do more but I think in some cases it's not a good thing'* (Fiona, p.10). Again, a shift in practice prompted more by resource management rather than professional reflection and development. In considering the next wave of policy changes, those emanating from the Social Exclusion agenda and informing the Connexions strategy, there was an appraisal of the unique value of careers guidance: *'Generally speaking the students' respond to having 40 - 50 mins.*

with somebody who actually talks to them about their ambitions and all the rest of it.. I mean, you can get the most difficult kid in school...in their interview it's completely different' (Terry, p.10). Fiona develops this appreciation of their role with clients, and their distinctive approach within the school context: *'We have such a different relationship with them compared to everybody else in the school, so different, so different.'* She concludes her sentence with a personal reflection on delivering careers guidance in this way: *'I think it's so valuable, satisfying'* (Fiona, p.10), a poignant comment which brings in the emotional aspect of professional practice.

A summary of this analysis was sent to all the members of the group, inviting their comments or amendments. Fiona, the Team Leader, responded on behalf of the group. They accepted the content, and asked if they could make two final comments. Firstly, that they had maintained the quality of work as well as producing the quantity. Secondly, that it is individual pride and working as a team that has resulted in meeting targets.

It was evident from this focus group interview that the group did work effectively as a team, and had sufficient trust to be able to debate amongst themselves, sometimes defending their position with passion. At the very end of the group, there was a sense of achievement that they had managed to come through the introduction of targets: *'We've got that tied down now. We know how to do that now'* (Jackie, p.16). There is no doubt that there is more change to come: *'No, I don't think we know too much about the future'* (Fiona, p.16). How will their experience of pressures since privatisation help them address the next wave of policy change?

SECTION 5

Conclusions

5.1 The effect of privatisation on professionals

The research question posed in this inquiry is how has privatisation affected careers guidance professionals. The focus is on their experience as professionals working for a private company whose major contract for guidance delivery is now directly with the DfEE, monitored by the Government Office for the region.

The expectation was that the privatisation would indeed have had some effect at different levels and across a number of domains, including the personal and the professional. The most likely outcome of this investigation would have been that the changes experienced in the organisation in the wake of privatisation would be experienced negatively, if for no other reason than that change *per se* can be unsettling, and change imposed from the external environment is more likely to be met with a negative response.

The majority of the respondents who took part in this research, that is all of those in Sample X and all of those who participated in the focus group interviews, worked for the same careers company. For reasons of confidentiality, this company has been identified only as Company X. Pre-privatisation, this had been part of a Local Education Authority, a county careers service. Post-privatisation the organisation appears little changed: it has not been divided or sold off or merged with any adjacent careers company nor incorporated into a larger guidance provider. It is, to all intents and purposes, the same organisation, with the same people delivering the same service to the same customers out of the same offices. The Principal Careers Officer became the Chief Executive, a powerful symbol of the familiar, boding well

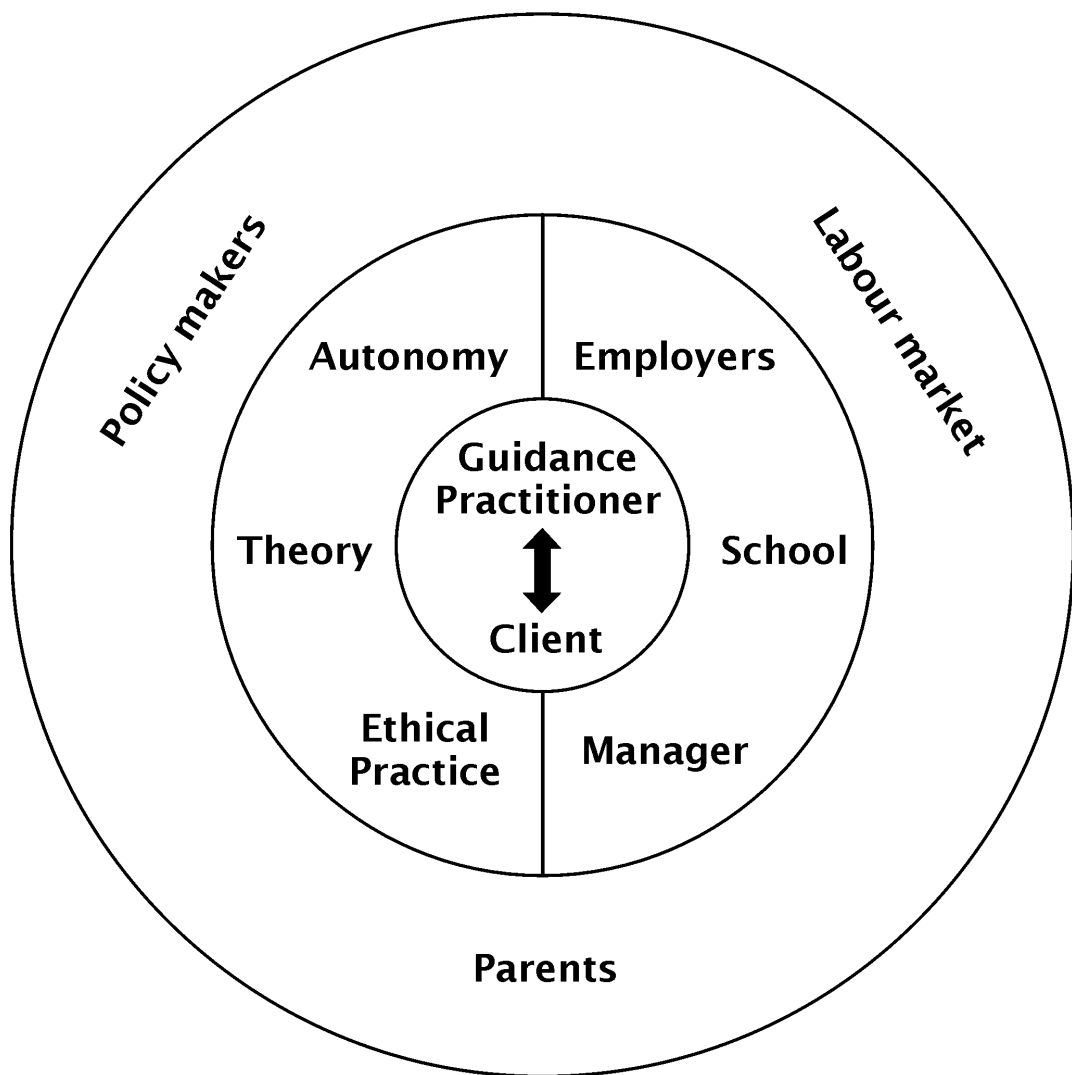
for continuity. Organisationally, the legal role of the major stakeholders has been enhanced, in that the new company comprises a partnership between the county council and the Training Enterprise Council (X Company, 1996) with the county council retaining the majority stake. Having secured a contract with the DfEE the company took no great strategic risks on privatisation, a common enough response across the new careers companies (DfEE, 1998b). This core contract was the fundamental shift from the old way of working to the new. It prescribed very explicitly the work to be undertaken in careers guidance provision. It required clear evidence of that work having been undertaken, and required the evidence itself should meet exact criteria. Everything pointed to a seamless transition from public sector provision to private company delivery, yet professionals clearly have found it difficult to manage both their own experience of incorporation and crucially, their subsequent careers guidance practice. The simplistic message given out by management to the professionals was that targets are only met when a careers guidance interview results in an action plan which is 'claimable'. Some managers went so far as to say that if targets are not met, then jobs will be at risk. For some practitioners, their professional judgement succumbs to management pressure. The evidence from the research indicates this kind of causal link between the funding mechanism and the pressure experienced by professionals. However, such a causal relationship between privatisation and pressure might imply the practitioner has to choose between being a good professional (judged by peers in the community of practice) or a good employee (judged by managerialist concern for output). The research however, discloses a complex and shifting picture of the lived experience in which professionals find themselves delivering what they consider to be effective careers guidance despite the target system. Practitioners can orient their interview

practice towards claimable action-planning, which should secure the funding for the core contract. But if they do routinise their interviews in this way, they compromise their claim to the autonomous practice in the interests of the client that characterises the work of the professional. The challenge has been to satisfy the professional imperative for client-centred practice whilst responding to management exigence.

5.2 Professionals under pressure: the kaleidoscope effect

Figure 5 (below) depicts the interaction of possible sources of pressure on careers guidance practitioners.

Figure 5: professionals under pressure: the kaleidoscope effect



Whilst practitioners undertake a range of activities, the one-to-one interview lies at the core of careers guidance, and as such occupies the central space in the diagram. Within this core space, the practitioner has to deal with that which is novel, incomplete or inchoate (Warren Piper, 1992) by drawing on theory and exercising ethical judgement to defend his or her autonomous practice. Beyond the physical space shared by practitioner and client lies an array of forces which will impinge on that relationship at various times, in different ways and to a greater or lesser degree. Arguably the practitioner can exercise a degree of control over some of the forces, namely theory and ethics. It is clear that the practitioner, once qualified, can exercise their own judgement about their commitment to keeping up to date with relevant theory and to what extent they apply new theory in their practice. Ethical practice too lies within the professional's gift; only the individual can decide on this, although their peers and managers may subsequently call inappropriate conduct into question. Other forces, however, lie beyond the practitioner's reach: schools; employers; managers and arguably the degree of actual autonomy experienced in practice.

For the practitioners in the research, undertaking interviews in schools, the needs and wants of schools are an everyday reality; furthermore, the practitioner has to mediate when the school agenda does not coincide with that of the careers company. Relations with schools emerged as a key issue from the data analysis, to the extent that it is discussed separately below. Parents can also exert pressure in their expectations of and relations with their children, and were accorded greater rights of access to data held and to the action plan produced. Practitioners were explicit that

they saw the action plan, although written for (and often with) the client, being addressed to the parents and beyond them into the public domain. Some saw the action plan as part of the company's marketing strategy. Employers also exert pressure in terms of actual vacancies available to clients as part of the careers interview and in the wider sense as part of the labour market. Work with employers had clearly been marginalised for these practitioners, and they commented on the reduction in service to all opportunity providers, including: employers and community organisations offering either employment or work experience and shadowing; providers of training; colleges of further education and institutes of higher education. The reduction in service was because this work attracts less emphasis in the funding formula (DfEE, 1996). Proof, to all intents and purposes, that in an outcome environment, only what gets counted gets done (Power, 1997).

Policy and policy-makers occupy a unique position in the diagram in that the research did not offer any evidence of practitioners owning a relationship with policy-makers and yet practitioners feel, indeed some feel acutely the presence of policy in many of their interactions with clients and other key stakeholders.

Figure 5 thus depicts the sense of complexity and inter-connection of pressures on guidance professionals; these pressures emanate from more than one source and are in some cases linked (policy-makers and managers for example). What the diagram cannot adequately convey is the interplay across the sources; the constant shifting and subsequent realignment. The kaleidoscope is a metaphor for a finite number of particles having a seemingly infinite number of configurations. When external circumstances change the particles of pressure shift and settle anew, in an unfamiliar pattern. The lived experience of the careers guidance professionals is both complex

and in certain aspects, unpredictable; the external environment in which they practise both volatile and inaccessible.

At the heart of careers guidance practice is the engagement and interaction with the client, whether working one to one or with a group. The policy behind the careers service reforms was explicit that the reforms were never intended to affect the actual guidance delivered, the quality of which was not at issue (DfEE, 1996). The intention was to reform the organisation of careers provision; to take it out of local education authority control into a quasi-market, following a path well trodden by other public sector professional services. Most of the practitioners questioned however were clear that the reforms had affected their guidance practice, and for the most part, concluded that the changes had not been for the better.

The emphasis on specific outcomes meant there was a tendency to orient the interview around the audit evidence rather than around client need. This exerts pressure against the knowledge base underpinning careers guidance. The audit trail demands as evidence of a guidance process one clear career idea with supporting rationale. Some current guidance theory however has cast doubt on this technical-rational assumption, arguing that people do not make one clear career decision, that they cannot really work only towards one specific career goal and that often what is labelled career decision-making is a no more than a series of responses to the happenstance which is life (Hodkinson *et al*, 1996, Watts & Kidd, 2000). It can be argued that the difficulty of anticipating and proactively managing the unpredictable is actually greater for those going through the transitional period of adolescence, which applies to all the clients in the action plan target group. The fundamental challenge for the careers practitioner is to work with a client, in real time, to help

them find their way in the decision-making process. The tension between a technical-rational push for a clear outcome, namely a career goal and the liberal, pragmatic pull of the careers interview as a valuable process masks a range of possible approaches to careers guidance. For some clients, the choice is bounded by their particular set of personal and family circumstances; for others, their circumstances permit wider parameters of opportunity and pro-active choice is clearly possible. This wide variety of client need presents a constant challenge to the careers guidance professional: to draw on their understanding of theories, choosing that which in their judgement best addresses client needs. One size does not fit all.

5.3 Working in schools

As already indicated, finding a balance between client need and contract compliance was most acute in relation to the core contract requirements for groupwork, which prescribed not only number of sessions but also the size of groups. It proved so difficult for practitioners to deliver what the contract specified within the confines of the schools in which delivery took place, that the practice of creative accounting in the reporting of groupwork became routine. The practitioners were vehement that it is only possible to meet targets with the active support of schools. In addition to being competent and organised, the practitioner needs to secure empathic understanding of the importance of achieving targets, translated into practical help. Practitioners make reference to 'good' schools, by which they mean a school that helps them. In the focus groups in particular, there were strong feelings about the relationship with schools, which seemed to have shifted from professional co-operation between careers co-ordinator and practitioner for the good of pupils/clients (Harris, 1999) to something closer to dependency of practitioner on teacher.

The relationships with schools show most acutely the vagaries of policy. Post privatisation, great emphasis was placed on working in schools, and evidently good relations were imperative if targets were to be achieved. The re-focusing of the careers service was interpreted by careers services as requiring careers guidance interventions, including individual interviews, be given only to those groups identified as being most at risk of failure or disaffection (DfEE, 1998f) thereby excluding pupils and students from the new target group: the socially excluded. As a consequence work in schools was drastically reduced. The experience of some of the practitioners was a volte-face from advancing work in schools one term to withdrawing it the next. The advent of the Connexions strategy (DfEE, 2000a) brought careers guidance formally into the social inclusion agenda: early signs were that careers guidance in schools would be marginalised, despite the introduction of Learning Mentors (DfEE, 1999c) which sought to prevent disaffection and failure in some targeted schools. Later the rhetoric changed to that of a universal service, though with differentiated provision. The current position (DfEE, 2000b, Hughes & Morgan, 2000) is that careers guidance will be provided in schools by a Personal Adviser, employed by a Connexions partnership but reporting to the Head Teacher.

The volatility of policy with regard to schools has clearly been a source of pressure on practitioners, who have had to shape their relations with schools to the wheel of policy imperative. The pressure on professionals emanates from policy seeming not to understand fully the knowledge base which underpins careers guidance practice; as a result, the performance indicators devised for contract compliance are not really measuring the work practitioners actually do.

5.4 Diversity in practitioner experience

The picture presented thus far has been one of some complexity and fluidity, a number of potential pressures interacting in their impact on the individual practitioner. This complexity is mirrored in the response of professionals to those pressures. Some respondents assumed that the only people to feel under pressure are those practitioners who had been used to practising under the previous regime, but this assumption is not borne out by the data. Many professionals, even those relatively new to the profession, have found it hard to practise within the target system and it is clear that the general reaction has been to feel the strain. Nevertheless, there is a complexity of experience in response to targets. Some welcome them, some are neutral about them and some are despondent. For some, initial difficulties were resolved by adapting to the new circumstances. Most practitioners find they are working harder: putting longer hours in when in the office; working through lunchtimes in schools; taking work home. The Trades Union representative in Focus Group 2 was adamant that working harder was widespread across all professionals in the company since privatisation.

Practitioners also talk about a kind of subversion, where they manage, within the interview space, to conduct the kind of interview they judge to be appropriate whilst also meeting the funding requirements: one described accepting the action plan as the price she had to pay for doing the interview, and at least one explicit response echoed Edwards' (1998) contention that professionals have autonomy in how they achieve performance indicators, so long as the overall target is met.

Some practitioners have taken a clear decision to resist pressure; for one respondent, having time off work for stress meant a change in attitude on return to work. Several respondents refused to take personal responsibility for achieving the targets set,

seeing this as purely a management issue rather than an individual responsibility. Collegiality seems to be very important for the practitioners in one particular office, some of whom took part in Focus Group 2; there was a strong sense of collective responsibility, and a shared commitment to maintaining what they felt to be the appropriate level of client service whilst achieving their targets. Elsewhere in the company there was a sense of solidarity in adversity; each put in extra effort as an individual in order to achieve as a group.

All practitioners accepted both the principle and the practice of accountability. For all that they were employed in private companies, they recognised that as public sector professionals they have to be accountable. There was remarkably little call to be left alone to get on with the job as they saw fit; their self-image as practising professionals perhaps not yet sufficiently robust to take a protectionist stance. Their one clear message for the Government Office was to ‘carry their bags’ that is to come out with them to see careers guidance in practice. There was no resistance to accountability, but a weariness that the performance indicators somehow missed the mark.

It is clear that the fundamental relationship, that of practitioner and client, has been affected by targets. Every practitioner has had to make choices about how to practise in response to the funding and audit requirements. The interview is no longer a process shared only by the two players present: the professional and the client. There is a sense of the uninvited guest, where policy hovers in the interview, vying with the client for the practitioner’s attention.

5.5 Ethical drift

The research question addressed the experience of the professionals rather than the strategic management of the company; consequently there is no evidence that managers are indifferent to the place of personal values and professional ethics within the strategic management process. On the other hand, there is ample evidence of perceived managerial indifference to ethics, sufficient to harbour a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ within the organisation. Practitioners talk of management not understanding the current problems they face in day to day practice, and not consulting with them how best to work for company success: in the gathering of management information and appropriate information technology systems for example.

Even among practitioners, a relatively homogeneous group by training and function, the experience is not the same for all. There is a spectrum spanning a range of experiences shading from one end to the other. When assessing the management position however, the professionals assume there is a homogeneous managerial stance in which ethics plays no apparent part. Whilst this may only be an assumption, the mere perception of ethical drift in itself is as damaging to management credibility and professional morale and as actual divergence from the shared values of careers guidance practice.

The pressure professionals feel from the effect of targets is conflated with the sense of not being valued by the management, despite fulfilling a vital strategic function. The team leaders in the company (some of whom answered the questionnaire and some took part in the focus group interviews) have taken on what they describe as a peacemaker role, in which they mediate between management and practitioners. These team leaders occupy a difficult space between delivery and control; whilst

they have credibility with the professionals, as practising careers advisers, they clearly have no corresponding managerial weight.

This opposition of professional power against management power, characterised in the debate between professionalism and managerialism, can descend into parody: the professionals holding relatively little power but occupying the moral high ground whilst the managers hold the balance of power but care nothing for the end users. Whilst the depiction of the professional and managerial paradigms as parallel is useful in highlighting possible areas of conflict, the reality is rather less neatly delineated. The experience of the professionals in this research does not fall exactly into these two camps; although the picture is both more complex and subtle than the professionalist-managerialist stand off, it is also that much more difficult to present.

There is no definitive version of the lived experience, no one post-privatisation practice. However the vista of a moral high ground does linger in relation to the management of professionals; for the simple reason that professionals are expected to practise ethically and if registered with the Institute of Career Guidance, required to do so. In general, the practitioners aspire to ethical practice even if they do not articulate that aspiration explicitly in terms of the four principles (Beauchamp & Childress, 1983) which underpin ethical codes of practice.

The consideration of ethics amongst careers guidance professionals is usually in relation to their practice, often presented when a practitioner reconsiders a specific incident in a careers guidance encounter. Kitchener (1984), Cottone and Tarvydas (1998) and Birdsall and Hubert (2000), all offer approaches to the kind of dilemmas encountered by individual professionals in their day to day practice. The professional body to which most careers practitioners belong (Sadler & Watts, 2000) namely the

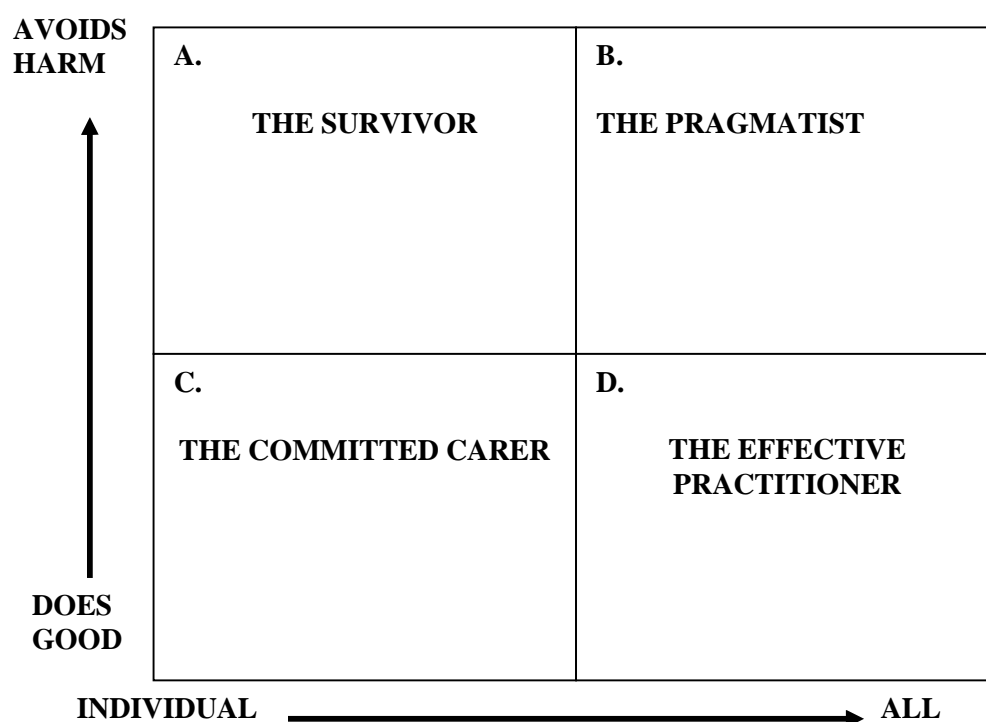
Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) requires all practitioners on its Register to practise by the Code of Ethical Practice (ICG, 1999). However the code applies only to the practitioner/client encounter; once you move away from the interaction between professional and client, there is no explicit requirement by the Institute to act ethically either as an employee or as a manager. Indeed, the Institute's Register of Practitioners takes a rather narrow view of 'practitioner', expecting only those with an allocated caseload to apply for registration. The inference is that you can be a practitioner or a manager in the ICG, but only practitioners subscribe to ethical practice.

With regard to organisational ethics, some attention is paid to explicit consideration of ethics in relation to strategy formulation, in terms of adding value to a product or service or forming a unique selling point. Critten (1998) encourages managers to be more professional, with all that implies for autonomy and reflective practice, sustained in turn by an ethical framework. Promotion from the professional ranks to a management position does not necessarily mean relinquishing ethical practice. Indeed, a professional-become-manager managing in a way which is at odds with the values of careers guidance practice is incongruent (Wall, 1993, Joyce, 1999). Without explicit consideration of how decisions are taken ethically, whether in the practice of careers guidance or the management of careers guidance practitioners, the organisation is at risk of ethical drift.

Ethical drift occurs when different groups (formal or informal) in the same organisation infer the other's ethical stance from their actions. From such observations they conclude that their relative positions are drifting apart, and the 'us'

versus ‘them’ perception is reinforced. The ethical principles matrix could be useful not as a mechanism for sorting professionals into types, but as a tool for mapping relative positions within and across a company.

Figure 3: ethical principles matrix



If any early signs of ethical drift are thus identified, possibly between professionals and managers, corrective action can be taken through explicit consideration of ethical practice in its broadest sense across the organisation, the better to harness corporate energy for the achievement of strategic goals.

This research focused exclusively on the experience of professionals, some of whom had a supervisory management function. It did not consider the experience of managers in the transition from LEA to limited company. The findings indicate that the experience of managers would be a fascinating complementary area for further

research. Considering the challenges inherent in managing autonomous professionals and the need to define organisational values in the new private/public hybrids would be invaluable in seeking to refine the concept of ethical drift.

5.6 Useful theory

The approach taken in this search was phenomenological, looking at the story of this sample of careers guidance professionals in their particular context. As such, the quest was not to generate covering laws, but to use grounded theory technique to derive, from the data itself, theoretical insights which might be of use. The following considerations for future action are offered, in the spirit of connective reflection to link with future practice (Fish, 1991) rather than prescriptive recommendations for concrete action.

In terms of strategic management, as companies are having to provide professional services to ever more sophisticated and demanding clients, the service itself is likely to face pressure to become more complex and more closely tailored to individual customer demand. Ideally, this customer challenge would in turn require employees who can think round complex problems and work across discipline to provide appropriate answers to novel problems. An organisation which seeks to simplify its business and routinise its workforce is not equipping them as professionals, nor itself as a company to respond to complexity and unpredictability in the external environment. Success in such an environment might be sought through commitment to staff development, even though really encouraging employees to innovate means allowing them to try something new and occasionally to fail. Above all, however, staff development requires that the people themselves recognise what they have learnt from their experience. This kind of reflection has to be resourced, at some real

cost to the company; but only through that kind of true investment in people can they and the organisation learn. There is some hope that the advent of Connexions partnerships affords practitioners and managers alike the chance to reflect, and indeed the draft standards explicitly encourage such activities (DfEE, 2001: 3eii). Beyond the advantages for employees and organisations, reflection on practice fulfils an important role in the claim to professional practice: 'If CEG practitioners want to be seen as professionals, reflective practice and, by direct implication, developing a research culture are essential' (CRAC 1998, p.6). There is some evidence in this research, that the ICG has little impact on the day to day lives of careers guidance professionals. There seems to be a need for the Institute to ensure their members feel properly represented as the profession moves into the Connexions era and a second Labour term.

All professions can expect closer government interest in their self-regulation (Friedman *et al.*, 2000; Phillips, 2001) and should include social reporting as part of their evaluation and quality assurance procedures. For professional services delivered at public expense, stakeholder evaluation will be critical, although this runs the risk of identifying a service which cannot be funded, in effect creating a demand which cannot be supplied. The Careers Research Advisory Council (CRAC) predicts innovation will be the hallmark of successful careers companies, and recommends investment to increase intellectual capital. It also connects competitive success with research 'successful innovation will almost certainly require CEG providers to have strategic planning processes which embrace the findings of external and internal research and evaluation' (CRAC, 1998, p.2). Again, the Connexions partnership arrangements can be seen as an opportunity for careers companies to engage in

research in order to demonstrate both added value and value for money. There is scope here for practitioners to engage in research, for example in the conduct of focus groups. This method is useful in gathering a range of opinions from stakeholders, and careers guidance professionals are likely to have the necessary skills to run them.

It is very clear that the Government expects the Connexions service to make a demonstrable difference to the lives of the young people in the target group, but the early indications of the performance indicators offer a significant contrast with the action plan target ethos: 'The success of the Connexions Service and of individual Personal Advisers will be measured not by the number of assessments carried out and plans created, but by the material difference made to the lives of young people aged 13-19' (DfEE, 2001, para. 2.6.2). There is greater emphasis on so-called softer outcomes, including the notion of distance travelled (DfEE, 2001) from the baseline assessment made by the Personal Advisor in the initial client consultation. In stark contrast with the technical rational expectation of one clear career idea with little chance for follow-up, it is assumed that Connexions clients will return for a series of interventions from a range of services, accessed and co-ordinated by the Personal Adviser. The monitoring procedures appear very different from the purely quantitative regime experienced by the practitioners in this research. The emphasis will be to 'record summative data...in order that progress - and particularly softer outcomes - can be monitored' (DfEE, 2001, para. 3.2). Whilst there is some cause for optimism in this change of emphasis, this must be tempered by the experience of the points tariff, which promised to relieve some target pressure, but made no discernible difference to the professionals' experience.

A decade ago Bradley concluded that the: ‘careers service has been operating under considerable pressures in recent years’ arguing that the careers service’s responsiveness was not a weakness, but a ‘testimony to its adaptability’ (1990, p.154). Responsiveness, however, is a close cousin to passivity, and will not be enough to ensure careers companies survive the inevitable changes yet to come. The Connexions era, initially perceived as a threat, may yet prove to offer careers professionals their best chance to articulate that which is unique and desirable in careers guidance practice. If practitioners have felt under pressure working to quantitative targets, then the prospect of softer outcomes (which take account of the flawed reality of the lives of the socially excluded) may come as a welcome change. It may equally come as a rude awakening if individual practitioners and companies have to present evidence of added value. Brien (1998) argues that the only way for employers and governments to regulate professionals is to set them free, asking who would trust an organisation that did not trust its own employees. Whilst such radical liberation may offer a greater degree of freedom than careers professionals could cope with, there is an argument for setting practitioners free from target pressure. Such freedom would, of course, entail the responsibility to develop their practice, to innovate, to make mistakes and learn from them, and to engage in dialogue with the community of practice.

My research has been undertaken in this spirit of responsible freedom. I have developed as a researcher, as a teacher and as practitioner, and engaged in dialogue with the wider community through conference presentations and article submissions, teaching on the initial and post qualifying courses and in service training. The pressure on careers professionals now is to rise to the challenge of engaging in

reflective practice and research activities to further the knowledge base which sustains the community of practice; the pressure for me is to continue to find my place within that community, across three discourses: the professional; the managerial and the academic.

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Appendix 1

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. It is an essential part of independent research towards a doctoral degree at the University of Warwick; the aim is to provide a snapshot of the current experience of guidance professionals. All responses will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Please circle the appropriate answers

- 1 Is your current job;** full time part time job share
- 2 Is your current job contract ;** permanent temporary
- 3 How long have you been in this job?**
- 12 months or less 1 --2 years 3-5 years 5 --9 years 10 years or more
- 4 Do you hold a guidance qualification?**
- Expect to qualify DCG Part 1 DCG Part 2 NVQ Level 4 Other
- 5 If you hold the DCG Parts 1 and 2, how long have you been fully qualified?**
- 1-2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 21+ years
- 6 Which category best fits your job?**
- Education Labour Market Manager/Team Leader
- 7 In your current job, do you have to meet imposed targets, e.g. a certain number of action plans?** Yes No
- 8 What other kind of targets do you have to meet?**
- 9 In previous jobs, including those outside guidance, did you have to meet targets?**
- Yes No

Please turn to page 2

The following questions invite either a Yes/No answer, or more extensive, open answer. Please feel free to continue overleaf if you need more space.

10 Would you say you have freedom to organise your work, for example, in allocating your time to a range of activities? Yes/No

11 In general, how much would you say you value the freedom to allocate your time?

12 Do you view targets as a useful framework for organising your work? Yes/No

13 Do you feel that meeting target has affected the way you deliver guidance? Yes/No

If yes, how would you describe the effects of targets on the way you deliver guidance?

14 Do you consider targets an appropriate tool to measure the work you do? Yes/No

What other measures would you welcome in addition to numerical targets?

15 How would you say the introduction of targets has affected your motivation and general morale?

16 If you manage others, how would you say the introduction of targets has affected the way you manage?

17 The Careers Service Performance Assessment Survey (1997) reported that ‘some careers officers find it hard to balance client need and numerical targets’. How do you do it?

The next phase of the research will involve telephone interviews and focus groups to examine in more detail the issues raised in this questionnaire. If you are prepared to consider being involved in the next phase, please let me have your name, address and telephone number. All responses will be treated in the strictest confidence. Many thanks again for your co-operation.

Appendix 2

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Appendix 3

Sample X Data

Administered January 1998

N=64, percentages give to nearest whole number

Where appropriate, individual responses are identified as (X1), (X2) etc.
Square brackets indicate explanatory note by MRM.

		Number	Percentage
Q1	Is your current job		
	Full-time	57	89%
	Part-time	7	11%
	Job Share	0	0%

Q2	Is your current job contract		
	Permanent	61	95%
	Temporary	3	5%

Q3	How long have you been in this job?		
	12 months or less		
	1 - 2 years	10	16%
	3 - 5 years	12	19%
	5 - 9 years	23	36%
	10 years or more	8	13%
		11	17%

Q4	Do you hold a guidance qualification?		
	Expect to qualify		
	DCG Part 1	6	9%
	DCG Part 2	9	14%
	NVQ Level 4	47	73%
	Other NVQ5 & Dip. in Management	1	2%
		1	2%

Q5	If you hold the DCG Parts 1 and 2, how long have you been fully qualified? (47 of sample)		
	1 - 2 years		
	3 - 5 years	21	45%
	6 - 10 years	11	23%
	11 - 15 years	7	15%
	16 - 20 years	5	11%
	21 + years	2	4%
		1	2%

Q6	Which category best fits your job?	Number	Percentage
	Education		
	Labour Market	35	55%
	Elements of both	8	13%
	Manager/Team Leader	4	6%
		17	27%

Q7	In your current job, do you have to meet imposed targets, e.g. a certain number of action plans?		
	Yes	61	95%
	No	3	5%

Q8	What other kind of targets do you have to meet? (Raw figures are given as multiple answers could be given)		N/A
		38	
	Delivering groupwork in school	30	
	Employer liaison work	28	
	Work with parents	18	
	Negotiating service level with school	17	
	Interviews other than Action Plan	10	
	Placing clients into work, training		
	Internal quality e.g. database accuracy,	8	
	Answering phone in 3 rings	5	
	Training (own development)	4	
	Training others		

Q9	In previous jobs, including those outside Guidance, did you have to meet targets?		
	Yes	29	45%
	No	35	55%

Q10	Would you say you have freedom to organise your work, for example, in allocating your time to a range of activities?		
	Yes	46	72%
	(Yes, but)	(19)	(30%)
	No	13	20%
	Both Yes and No	2	3%
	No response	3	5%

Q10 Would you say you have freedom to organise your work, for example, in allocating your time to a range of activities?

‘But only within overall activity plan.’ (X3)

‘But increasingly less autonomy.’ (X4)

‘When organising work programme in schools etc.’ (X9)

‘Although some things have had to go e.g. employer work as there is no time to do this.’ (X12)

‘We have duty rota.’ (X13)

‘To an extent.’ (X16)

‘To some extent.’ (X22)

‘Sometimes, no, depending which school I am in.’ (X24)

‘Within the constraint of targets, school’s own agendas, etc.’ (X31)

‘To an extent.’ (X40)

‘Except core activities have to be met and certain activities have to take place.’ (X52)

‘Within a set framework.’ (X54)

‘To a limited extent. There is a certain flexibility as long as the targets are met.’ (X57)

‘As long as targets are met in accordance with projections in Business Plan.’ (X58)

‘But within very restricted guidelines, the prioritisation is predetermined.’ (X63)

Of the two respondents who answered both Yes and No, one explained;

‘But limited in content of work organised due to time pressures.’ (X3)

The three respondents who chose neither Yes, nor No, went on to expand;

‘Yes in theory, but only partially in practice because so many specific tasks have to be carried out each month.’ (X28)

‘Sometimes I have some freedom, often I don’t.’ (X37)

‘To a certain extent, accommodating needs of the schools and office I work in.’ (X39)

Explanation of "No" answers;

‘Because of targets that have to be met, school timetable restrictions due to level of school co-operation for access to pupils. Although it is down to me to organise my time in school ‘freedom’ is limited due to above.’ (X5)

Q11 In general, how much would you say you value the freedom to allocate your time?

All respondents valued this freedom, with 55 (86%) qualifying their answer as:

‘Very highly, it is the only way to try new initiatives, innovate and focus on the quality of one’s work.’ (X2)

‘Value highly within overall framework.’ (X3)

‘I value the autonomy which is expected of a professional.’ (X4)

‘Paramount.’ (X6)

‘A great deal - it’s one of the things that keeps me in this job.’ (X7)

‘This is vital when planning work, especially if you have 1/2 institutions to deal with.’ (X8)

‘Very much.’ (X9)

‘Greatly but the degree of autonomy is small plus as we are separated into Education and Labour Market teams I as a member of the former get little opportunity to visit employers.’ (X10)

‘Completely - I would find the job intolerable without such freedom.’ (X11)

‘A lot.’ (X12)

‘A lot.’ (X13)

‘I value this very much, it helps to be flexible when negotiating with schools.’
(X14)

‘Very highly.’ (X15)

‘Very highly.’ (X16)

‘Highly.’ (X17)

‘Essential. To deliver to quality guidance and meet school and client needs. The absence of freedom impinges on that.’ (X18)

‘A lot - it is what I valued in my previous job - still got the job done.’ (X19)

‘Highly.’ (X20)

‘Very much.’ (X21)

‘Highly.’ (X22)

‘Greatly.’ (X23)

‘I value this very much as when I don’t have the freedom I find this frustrating and feel it is unfair to young people who have different levels of CEG (careers education and guidance) input dependent on which school they are attending.’ (X24)

‘It is essential to me.’ (X25)

‘Greatly.’ (X26)

‘Highly- puts me in control of making the most effective (professional use of my time).’ (X27)

‘Very highly.’ (X28)

‘It is enourmous (too many u’s?!) importance and I value it VERY highly.’ (X29)

‘Very highly but my time is increasingly controlled by managers specifying days for being in office and attending meetings.’ (X30)

‘It is a very important part of the job.’ (X31)

‘Very highly.’ (X32)

‘A great deal.’ (X33)

‘Organise and allocate time to every aspect of my work.’ (X34)

‘V. much. I do Special Needs work much of which exists outside the targets regime and is not valued by it.’ (X35)

‘Very much although the amount of freedom is diminishing with the advent of government schemes - Bonus, etc, which expects you to interview a certain group.’ (X36)

‘Very highly.’ (X37)

‘It is quite important, but to be honest it is the school programme that dictates when, where and how.’ (X38)

‘A great deal.’ (X39)

‘A fair amount.’ (X40)

‘On a scale of 1 (top) to 10 (bottom) I rate at 1.’ (X41)

‘There isn’t sufficient time to spend much time on planning due to the nature of my caseload and lack of administration time.’ (X42)

‘All work is planned on a rota basis to ensure equality of allocation between Team members - overseen by Team Leader.’ (X43)

‘Extremely valuable for people who manage their time well. Others need a structure. I favour the former.’ (X44)

‘Very important.’ (X45)

‘A lot.’ (X46)

‘A great deal.’ (X47)

‘Very highly.’ (X48)

‘Freedom to allocate time has to take account of necessity to achieve targets.’ (X49)

‘A lot.’ (X50)

‘100%. I enjoy the concept of personal time/self management and the freedom it gives to respond to client needs.’ (X51)

‘Value it very much as I am a professional. (X52)

‘Highly valued - this is one of the main reasons which attracted me to this work.’ (X53)

‘It is very important to me and my work.’ (X54)

‘I value this freedom a great deal.’ (X55)

‘Essential element of the job, as it enables me to be proactive in planning new projects and managing work around customers.’ (X56)

‘I would value less constraints i.e. the freedom to make the action plan meet the individual client’s needs rather than conform to government guidelines.’ (X57)

‘Very much’. (X58)

‘Very much. As a Team Leader and also a Co-ordinator with a caseload in an F.E. college, I have a whole range of responsibilities like training, resources etc. Need to be able to prioritise and there’s not enough time for all my work.’ (X59)

‘Very much- it allows me to focus work on areas I feel important.’ (X60)

‘Very much.’ (X61)

‘Highly.’ (X62)

‘Very much.’ (X63)

‘Value this element of my work quite highly.’ (X64)

Q12 Do you view targets as a useful framework for organising your work?

	Number	Percentage
Yes	36	56%
No	25	39%
Not applicable	3	5%

The following qualifying comments were offered:

‘But not at expense of driving guidance rather than meeting need.’ (X3)

‘No- as a result I use them as a guide and I am now conditioned to it.’ (X5)

‘Yes, but it would help if they were not so prescriptive.’ (X12)

‘No, impede my work.’ (X13)

‘Yes, but the internal, personally imposed targets.’ (X27)

‘Framework being the important word within context.’ (X29)

‘Yes, but only if they are realistic and can be flexible with good reason.’ (X39)

‘Yes, as I am proactive.’ (X52)

‘They can be, together with other management tools.’ (X55)

‘Not sure. Some framework is useful but current targets are too prescriptive, and do not address needs of individuals and schools/colleges.’ (X57)

‘I try to ignore them and try and concentrate on providing good ceg [careers education and guidance] in college.’ (X59)

‘Sometimes.’ (X61)

‘Conceptually yes, but not as currently exercised.’ (X63)

Q13 Do you feel that meeting targets has affected the way you deliver guidance?

	Number	Percentage
Yes	55	86%
Not applicable	3	5%
No	6	9%

Q13 Prompt: If “Yes”, how would you describe the effects of targets on the way you deliver guidance?

‘My approach to client is very much focused on work options and not so much on exploring interests and other options as time doesn’t allow this.’ (X1)

‘Completing an action plan, using a computer during a time limited interview affects the quality of my interaction with the client- there is too much time spent inputting data that is not relevant to the guidance interview, but which we are told is necessary. The Requirements of the A.P. (action plan) in order to be claimable means that one has to get information out of the client whether or not it is relevant to the client’s situation or needs.’ (X2)

‘More difficult to respond to needs of clients who require more long-term interactions/guidance. For early interviews in school, above applies, as MOST schools do not have a well developed CEG (careers education and guidance) programme that has been running for any length of time and pre-preparation is not yet well advanced for most young people.’ (X3)

‘It is now more prescriptive and less guidance with the need for Action Plans and targets.’ (X4)

‘ More interviews in a day therefore (I think) quantity up, quality down- more interviews in a week - more days spent interviewing consecutively i.e. interview overload. Tendency to see pupils as another one to tick off target rather than individual who needs guidance. To deliver groupwork targets that fit in with school timetable you have to ‘make-do’ with insufficient time to allocate to particular topics therefore some important aspects of the CEG (careers education and guidance) programme can be rushed. Pressure of targets means much reduced admin time for follow up to interviews both for myself and for the pupils - research opportunities much less therefore knowledge updating/increase suffers greatly. Cannot attend relevant and needed info days and college visits as often as I would wish.’ (X5)

‘I find that target chasing and administration bites into my time previously allotted for in depth follow-ups for all clients - I now have to be more selective and economical with my time. I am also responsible for Special Needs clients. Again target chasing in my other allotted establishments restricts the "extra" time I used to give the Special Need schools.’(X6)

‘There is a constant need to keep a check on how time is spent and to make sure it’s allocated in the most advantageous way- for me and clients. It has made me more creative in getting clients as well prepared as its possible to do before they arrive for one to one interview. Second/subsequent interactions are becoming increasingly rare. I feel that the very inflexible rules from DFEE for the content of a claimable plan of action have a negative effect on my interaction. I am so conscious of checking all the points have been included that I find myself almost ignoring the client sometimes. If all points are not included payment isn’t made and I’m likely to get the plan of action back from our ‘Quality team’ marked out of 10 with comments!’ (X7)

‘Interviews have to be strictly time regulated, therefore the quality and quantity is affected.’ (X8)

‘I keep strictly to the agreed programmes in school, and only make changes if it is absolutely necessary. I do not feel the quality of guidance is affected in any way.’

(X9)

i) cannot offer additional interviews to a number of clients who need more than one guidance interview in a year

ii) less personal autonomy in organising my work (i.e. when I do group work is constricted to available slots in school’s time-table).’ (X10)

‘Sometimes I suspect that the desire to meet targets results in clients getting a less than adequate service.’ (X11)

‘I no longer feel that I’m there for the client and their need. I feel I view clients now as walking Action Plans. It’s no longer can I help the client it’s can they help me!’

(X13)

‘Although I am not against the principles of accountability the targets often mean that not enough time is given per interview. Some clients may need 30 minutes, others 60 minutes. There are big problems with group work targets. These have to be met by delivering to small groups although it is more efficient in many ways to address whole groups e.g. full class of 30 pupils. Sometimes groups have to be split just to meet the targets, this is really being pedantic. Instead of numbers it is far more important to monitor the value and quality of careers guidance.’ (X14)

‘Subliminal pressure on clients to agree to a plan of action, goals etc. Hastening clients to make decisions.’ (X15)

‘It results in a pressure to ‘Action Plan’ everyone you see whether it is appropriate or not. There are not always adequate time slots therefore, for follow-up interviews, so "drop ins" in lunchtime become the norm. Someone needing several sessions and

perhaps a great deal of support might not count to anything towards your targets. I hope this is not apparent to the client but it is always on your mind.’ (X16)

‘Despite the fact of not having personal targets as yet, I am still expected to deliver POAs [Plan of Action] for every interview - even if they are not appropriate at that time for that client.’ (X17)

- ‘1. Dictates what you do
2. and how you do it,
3. Absence of freedom.’ (X18)

‘Specifies when, for example, interviews have to take place - this isn’t necessarily when it’s useful to the students, more time spend on stats means less time for research.’ (X19)

‘There is a conflict, between quality and quantity in relation to guidance work targets, but I try to ensure that the client always comes first and is not affected by the targets too much.’ (X20)

‘ Useful performance indicator.’ (X23)

‘Time constraints. Having to produce Plans of Action to be issued immediately to the Y.P. [young person] means having to check spelling etc. also some Y.P.s are not ready to have a POA [Plan of action] but targets mean that we have to be slightly directive if they have several career choices.’ (X24)

- ‘ - less time in being creative with groupwork preparation
- less time to meet with staff to negotiate (within school/college)
- sometimes quality is effected negatively ‘ (X25)

‘In many cases new requirements mean a longer interview time - Information Technology/Government requirements. Not always possible to impose this requirement on schools therefore pushed for time/versus some quality of guidance.’ (X26)

‘They have created a pressure to generate action plans in more cases than may be of benefit to the client or for which the client may not yet be ready. Methods for counting some aspects of CEG (careers education and guidance) are dubious. Having to meet first action plan targets can prevent the adviser from allocating time to subsequent interviews for clients who may have such a need.’ (X27)

‘ In my own mind, client need (I mean by client the people with whom I carry out interviews, groupwork, etc.) is paramount. I am concerned that as, e.g. I produce and action plan, I am preoccupied by the need to include certain criteria (time-based action points for example) so that the plan is "claimable". Its claimability seems, at bottom, an irrelevance in comparison to whether or not the client has been helped. Given that we work always with individuals, the framework of measurement of output created by targets is inevitably too rigid to allow us as practitioners to attend, as much as most of us would want to, to the details of what we are being told by the client to reflect on its implications, etc, etc.’ (X28)

‘Perceived pressure to get figures, work overtime, more emphasis on teamwork than in the past.’ (X30)

‘Action plan targets in particular have forced me to deliver a plan to my (?) timetable rather than when the client is vocationally ready.’ (X31)

‘Work around targets rather than focussing on needs of clients and educational institutions. Sometimes clients need are met but not always in the manner I would prefer to work, i.e. is constant juggling act and compromise.’ (X32)

‘Action plans are too similar. Stress from team leader causes too much worry over POAs [Plans of Action]. POAs are somewhat false.’ (X33)

‘I feel on the defensive. Much valuable and important work that I do is not valued. Setting targets or measuring this work would not help. I need a culture which gives me the freedom and support to carry out what can be very emotionally demanding and difficult work.’ (X35)

‘The work is target led and detracts from the time I spend on each individual client. it also gives less time to read the piles of literature that is produced and therefore makes it difficult to keep abreast of current trends and thinking.’ (X36)

‘Unable to respond to the actual demand as it occurs. Have to be directive in interviews in order to find out the necessary points to make the action plan claimable.’ (X37)

‘Time allocation is reduced and the client is expected to have a certain amount of self- help.’ (X38)

‘Allowing more time to construct a satisfactory action plan during the allocated interview time. Therefore reducing time spent on other processes (introduction and exploration in interview). (X39)

‘Number crunching, lack of time for quality research.’ (X40)

‘ I would like to have the freedom to

- 1) spend more time with clients who need help
- 2) spend more time on good projects, planning, bidding for funding
- 3) more training’ (X41)

‘It imposes an in built agenda to writing action plans - often sub-consciously - which worries me. you also feel compelled to write an action plan, even if the client is not entirely ready for it. However I feel that demonstrable target achievement gives

purpose, professionalism and avoids inaccurate reporting of guidance delivered.’

(X42)

‘ The guidance is not affected; the conditions under which it is delivered are. Greater pressure to produce an action plan which meets all the Government criteria means vast amount of time are spent on exploration of client’s situation, at the expense of meeting their request for information, etc.’ (X43)

‘Conscious of getting an action plan.’ (X45)

‘Much less time to do follow up work. However I wouldn’t say it has affected what I do in interviews with individuals but there is less time to devote to each client.’ (X46)

‘Interviews more focused as required criteria. Clients like a sausage machine.’ (X47)

‘Conscious of category client falls into and as to whether an action plan can be claimed. Activities which would be desirable to undertake or additional help to needy clients has to give way to target pressure.’ (X49)

‘Less time for each individual client. Much more reliance on their own participation in the process of guidance.’ (X50)

‘The targets themselves are not the problem and I think they help to stimulate activity and develop innovation. The problem lies with the collection and presentation of statistical information which is supported by an inadequate IT [Information Technology] system. This results in having to use the computer at all times but because the software is unreliable, having to also produce manual statistics. In addition the use of the laptop does provide professional looking documentation but I believe it also intrudes into the interview. I feel it would be better to produce draft summaries during the interview and employ skilled clerical help for subsequent computer input.’ (X51)

‘The need to tailor it to Government requirements rather than individuals.’ (X52)

‘More hurried. More aware of meeting demands of action plans. More conscious that each young person is worth real money. Greater efforts made to catch up with those who have missed interview. Less time to prepare. Less time for research. Less time for follow-up.’ (X53)

‘I do not personally deliver guidance however I do believe that the targets can have a detrimental effect on the delivery of guidance if they are linked to inappropriate guidance activities. If a range of activities are translated into an appropriate entitlement and the delivery by this entitlement is linked to a contract price this would not seem to me to be an unreasonable request from a purchaser.’ (X55)

‘Although I have never worked in the system without targets, I feel that we have to be creative in the way we word action plans to ensure they are claimable, and therefore enabling me to meet targets. However, this does not impinge on the service I offer, as I am always willing to see a client again, to ensure they receive all the guidance they require.’ (X56)

‘The awareness that the interview must culminate in a claimable action plan as if a client needs to be seen several times there is not the flexibility within the numbers to do this. Groupwork targets do not reflect the needs of individual schools. Service is centred around targets and is therefore not client-centred.’ (X57)

‘I do less work directly on behalf of clients, often referring on or leaving individuals to work on their own behalf. I am always aware of requirements for a claimable plan of action and not all interviews would naturally fulfil these requirements, although they would be good guidance interviews. Less time for personal development/information gathering. I have had little difficulty meeting targets in numerical terms. The biggest problem for me is producing POAs [Plans of Action] which meet the very strict guidelines for claimable action plans from the Government Office. Because of targets I feel that if I spend 45-50 minutes with a client I need to be able to claim this work. It can be very difficult to establish rationale for example with clients where experiences are quite limited. On many occasions I would be much happier to make it an interview and not claim until a

subsequent meeting when it is often easier to establish clear goals and very definite action.’ (X58)

‘Always created problems in trying to offer quality guidance. There are problems relating to time and timetables in college. Guidance is much more about giving info and using wide range of resources at this level. Often interviews need to be longer. Interview targets are worked out on 20 minute basis - this is not possible in college where self-referral booking operates so all students must have chance of one hour interviews. Many interviews go over one hour and even second interviews can take that time. Action plans are much longer and take longer to write. They are done later in day and given to students via tutors (if they agree).’ (X59)

‘They certainly concentrate the mind!! On the positive front when negotiating with schools it has provided a lever on the amount of input into CEG [careers education and guidance] programmes and allows [guidance practitioners] a framework to negotiate perhaps supporting a practitioner when faced with a careers co-ordinator who is against Careers Service, might otherwise back down. When interviewing in order for action plan to be claimable you are required to inject rationale, realism and detail into guidance - challenge where necessary - therefore the option to collude with clients on a bad day is not there - must be good for guidance. However, stress on the job, covering your back takes its toll!!’ (X60)

‘Targets assume total 100% output. This is not realistic and so the amount of time/staff allocated is not sufficient to achieve the targets. Hence you spend more time than allocated on targets and essential research gets squeezed out.’ (X62)

‘ -Wording and style of action plans aimed at auditor, rather than client
-emphasis on dealing with clients who are “claimable” rather than in most need e.g. repeat interviews
- much less time for continuing professional development and basic updating of knowledge base
- working to dictates of Information Technology systems e.g. lack of flexibility in presentation of action plans.’ (X63)

‘Continually thinking about targets! Whether a y.p. [young person] meets the criteria for an action plan. Have we reached targets? What if we don’t....what happens? Told that if we don’t reach the targets staff could lose their jobs.’ (X64)

Q14 Do you consider targets an appropriate tool to measure the work you do?

	Number	Percentage
Yes Of which 6 accepted targets as only one indicator	28	44%
No	33	52%
No answer given	3	4%

What other measures would you welcome in addition to numerical targets?
n = 64, raw figures given, as multiple answers were given.

Client Feedback	18
Quality of guidance	15
School Feedback	11
Tracking/added value	11
Peer/self assessment	6
Parent feedback	4
Mentor/staff appraisal	4

Q15 how would you say the introduction of targets has affected your motivation and general morale?

	Number	Percentage
Positive effect	6	9%
No effect	13	20%
Detrimental	43	67%
Both positive and detrimental	2	3%

‘Being new in Careers I am still struggling to manage all aspects of the work involved. Finding the paperwork rather daunting as it takes a lot of time which could be used with clients.’ (X1)

‘Constant "moving of goalposts" damages morale. Churning out number - detracts from any sense of quality in work. There are clients who I would question if they are getting the service they need due to a practitioner being "chained" to targets. Why give quality careers education and guidance when by putting the correct post code or dialling code on and action plan and making sure that you issue a certain amount before April means that your organisation will be paid?’ (X5)

‘Negatively. Big brother syndrome has always been a turn off for me.’ (X6)

‘Positively - if everyone else exceeded the targets they were set to the same extent.’ (X7)

‘The stress factor has risen its ugly head. Pressure is now a way of life.’ (X8)

‘When the target "goalposts" are shifted it can become frustrating/irritating. One often feels that no matter what is achieved on a personal target, people are still demanding more. There are times when motivation disappears, and it is an uphill struggle to keep the enthusiasm going for the work. Generally I feel morale has gone down - all the managers are interested in is reaching the targets, and one is just a "number cruncher" not a person - or so it seems!’ (X9)

‘ I was not employed as CGA [Careers Guidance Adviser] prior to targets but I do feel that this crude, simplistic measurement of CGA work, as introduced by the previous government definitely affected colleagues’ morale.’ (X10)

‘I don’t think they have.’ (X11)

‘My motivation and general morale has gone down considerably since the introduction of targets. This is because there is strong pressure to meet these targets but careers advisers’ ability to do so depends on the goodwill, co-operation and efficiency of third parties, i.e. schools, colleges and indeed young people themselves. Where this fails from time to time you can be left with a feeling of helplessness and lack of control of the situation.’ (X12)

‘Pressurised - so negative. Fed up with service.’ (X13)

‘I have only worked in the Careers Service since the introduction of targets. I am not worried if I don’t meet targets, if targets are not met by a Careers Service there is probably a good reason and it is up to the management of the Careers Service to explain to agree [*sic*] with the local Government Office and not meekly accept every target set as being attainable.’ (X14)

‘As a recent probationer I’ve known no other. I believe a general view of current trainees is that the current target structure is more difficult for CGAs [Careers Guidance Advisor] with several years’ experience prior to privatisation.’ (X15)

‘This has not affected my delivery of careers guidance at all but the admin. involved, the need to journey 10 miles in heavy traffic back to the office to download daily (as is recommended) is exhausting. I am constantly playing "catch-up", regularly work at home during evenings and weekends.’ (X16)

‘I don’t feel I will be more motivated when I am given targets. I just feel I will be more pressurised.’ (X17)

‘Feeling of being used. Inconsiderate management. I am employed as a professional able to make decisions, after analysis and evaluation, about how I might best deliver in the job given demands of clients and customers. Targets to a large extent take that away.’ (X18)

‘Lowered it - although to be honest I don’t pay a great deal of attention to targets - I just do what I can do! Still see clients over a period where they need it, even if this only achieves one action plan.’ (X19)

‘It depends whether the caseload given can be realistically carried out in order to meet the targets. you are in school as much as possible and still will not meet the targets it can cause stress.’ (X20)

‘Targets existed before I joined the Careers Service therefore always been used to them.’ (X21)

‘Has no effect - always worked with targets.’ (X23)

‘Yes. Makes one feel very much under pressure and stressful. Has left little time for quality preparation and evaluation.’ (X24)

‘Increased motivation.’ (X25)

‘Feel inevitable to be accountable.’ (X26)

‘I did not work within the Careers Service before the introduction of targets.’ (X27)

‘I am still very motivated by my clients. I am depressed that it has not, apparently, been possible so far to suggest to Government agencies that a more enlightened approach to control of careers guidance activities is necessary and can work. I feel, perhaps unjustifiably, there has been a failure/betrayal by our own professional bodies.’ (X28)

‘Depressed me...seem to spend too much time filling in forms, computer entries, monitoring. Feeling tired all the time.’ (X30)

‘The implementation has created a climate of fear. "If targets are not met - jobs are on the line!" Need for confidence on part of management to accept overall trend towards targets in a year, not a monthly panic.’ (X31)

‘Negatively. Feel more stressed as no time to be creative in work done in groups.’
(X32)

‘Taken enjoyment from job. Exhaustion at times especially because we have to do reception duties after school, as permanent staff shortage!’ (X33)

‘You know what you have to achieve and by when.’ (X34)

‘It has lowered both significantly.’ (X35)

‘Motivation has been affected - its now like working on a conveyor belt which is moving at a constant pace without you having a break.’ (X36)

‘It has made me frustrated, demotivated, angry at the time I feel I have to waste planning to meet the targets.’ (X37)

‘When I have achieved the target required I feel that I am then covering those who have underachieved.’ (X38)

‘On occasions, I find morale reduced if we constantly discuss targets, spending a large amount of time on this issue rather than getting down to "real work"!’ (X39)

‘Decrease motivation/morale as too high, not enough flexibility and have led to "blame" culture.’ (X40)

‘Increase insecurity. Lowered morale. Increased motivation to leave careers service.’ (X41)

‘I joined the service after targets were implemented, so it has not affected me. I have worked for Employment Services and in education prior to my role as a careers adviser. Both of these jobs were target driven, so I have accepted targets as a fact of working life. I have noticed depressed morale amongst colleagues. ‘ (X47)

‘Definitely demoralising and demotivating, in terms of rigidity of expected achievement. Frustrated that my main focus is not the client in front of me, but how to construct an action from this interview which will be acceptable to Government Office.’ (X43)

‘The introduction of targets have seriously affected morale due to the manner in which they were introduced i.e. "if you don't hit the targets there are implications and jobs are at risk!" ‘ (X44)

‘It is difficult to say as I entered service when targets already there.’ (X45)

‘I am not as worried by targets now as I was when they were first introduced having met them purely by continuing the level of work I was almost already doing. I would say that the main pressure is the admin that goes along with the work and the pressure of producing typed action plans.’ (X46)

‘Lowered both motivation and morale - unobtainable.’ (X47)

‘To some extent. I feel it has cramped the way we work to some extent.’ (X48)

‘Client centred approach has moved towards target centred approach.’ (X49)

‘Working in the labour market, the only real way to assess achievements accurately is via numbers so my morale has not been affected adversely. Moreover, my motivation has increased for my job.’ (X50)

‘It has not made a lot of difference as I have always set personal targets.’ (X51)

‘Depressing.’ (X52)

‘It has made the job more difficult - time has had to be found to keep records etc. Very conscious of work now having a monetary value, especially interview.’ (X53)

‘Motivation and morale are generally low - with the feeling that whatever you achieve is not sufficient. Also the feeling that the company want "more for less".’ (X53)

‘Speaking as a manager, I would say that the working with targets is not the demotivating issue - morale may have been lowered because the targeted activities are not always seen as appropriate.’ (X55)

‘It has made me more motivated, as it has developed a sense of competition. However, there are some occasions when my morale is low, due to pressures. But like everything, there is light at the end of the tunnel, and my love of the job keeps me going.’ (X56)

‘Yes - lack of preparation time means you tend to take group work off the shelf - no time to read information or visit employers or HE institutions to update knowledge. A particular situation, with regard to the high numbers of trainees and probationers in my office has meant that caseloads are too high.’ (X57)

‘Personally I am still well motivated, if I was not I would leave the service. I feel most of us do an extremely good job which is often under-rated. I feel the obsession from Head Office has generally lowered morale.’ (X58)

‘Added to stress. Managers forget how difficult it can be in the field (many haven’t practised for many years!) and keep putting pressure on advisers. Had period of 5 weeks off (never more than 5 days in a year before) due to physical stress which resulted in depression. I felt much better when I came back! This actually make [*sic*] me re-evaluate my attitude to work.’ (X59)

‘In some way, quite perversely, it has boosted my morale because I have been able - so far touch wood etc - to achieve targets and job satisfaction. However I feel that it has had a disastrous effect on many colleagues. I cannot explain this except to say that I have always welcomed change, never been intimidated by authority and taken the attitude "this is how it is - if it's not possible I won't be able to do it".’ (X60)

‘I prefer accountability as I don't like carrying passengers, nevertheless motivation is hard to maintain on a steep learning curve when change is the norm and the goal posts change making achievement of targets harder. We work in schools and colleges, we are managed from a base of people who are unfamiliar with school culture. You are between the devil and the deep blue sea.’ (X62)

‘Feel more like an Action-Planning machine than a professional adviser. More demotivating is the constant change in how targets are interpreted and applied. When the goal posts are constantly moving then the whole concept of targeting becomes devalued.’ (X63)

‘Become too focussed on the target task in hand rather than on the yp [young person] in front of you. Never enough time to complete a job. My morale has, at times, dipped pretty low especially when [Government Office] keep piling on the targets without any thought of how this is going to be achieved.’ (X64)

Q16 If you manage others, how would you say the introduction of targets has affected the way you manage?

21 (33%) of the sample classified themselves as team leaders, but not senior management. The descriptor ‘player - manager’ was used in 5 cases.

‘Inevitably, awareness of targets must always be behind the main contract being met. This does affect teams having to meet these first before all else - this does affect many other aspects of the work and thus people need more encouragement to keep motivation high.’ (X3)

‘I have made myself and others aware but still believe only so much can be done - if not looking realistically would accept and look at where shortfalls may be covered and future strategies would rather do smaller amount of "quality" work rather than larger amounts of "quantity".’ (X26)

‘Again, always had targets, interestingly people respond differently to targets and many people are quite hard to move forward. It is "challenging" to encourage people to take up "accountability" with regard to targets.’ (X29)

‘Did not manage others prior to introduction of targets.’ (X46)

‘Pressure put on me to be more of a policing manager.’ (X47)

‘I find I have to help people maintain the quality of their guidance skills within this climate.’ (X48)

‘People get "hung up" on achieving individual targets and this can result in people working against each other rather than as a team. By concentrating on team targets rather than individual targets this helps.’ (X49)

‘Much more close monitoring of the team’s work, creating a closer knit unit.’ (X50)

‘It helps to monitor performance but I am conscious targets do place a great deal of stress on some people which does not help performance.’ (X51)

‘Make them depressed and not able to make decisions themselves taken away their autonomy. Also sheer targets e.g. high numbers, e.g. doing x interviews each, taking things from your "mind" is very demanding and which may lead to enormous stress.’ (X52)

‘Need to keep on top of what people are doing, constantly. I always seem to be asking them for figures. Need to stress accountability and quality at team meetings on a regular basis.’ (X53)

‘As a team leader I spend time with team members explaining, reassuring, training and empathising re targets. Targets are a big issue when it comes to managing a team. I think it would be very naive of CGAs [Careers Guidance Advisers] to underestimate the importance of targets.’ (X54)

‘I monitor achievement against profiled business activities more rigorously. Otherwise, my management style has remained unchanged by targets.’ (X55)

‘As team leader it can be used as a tool to monitor performance, although I would take into consideration other areas of their work, if there were any. As a team leader I would not expect this to change the way I managed people, because the vast majority of industries have targets, we have to learn to live with it. The points system may help, as can work on other projects and have the work counted. We are living in a changing world of work. We as practitioners have to accept changes as well as other professionals and employees.’ (X56)

‘Instead of a 20% reduction in caseload for a team leader, I am doing extra school work. I feel therefore that I am not fulfilling my management role well, and providing the support that I would like to the trainees and probationers.’ (X57)

‘I still look at circumstances around numerous figures, such as training, etc, and would support a non-achieving colleague. However, we have to produce the targets and I always ensure my team are aware of the importance to the company and their personal success within this company.’ (X58)

‘Made them very stropky, anti-management. Very difficult to keep asking them to do more when I know it’s not possible. I try to be understanding (as I have a difficult caseload in college!) and share ways and means of improving things for individuals. Do mentoring/coaching. Encourage personal development. Am the peacemaker between staff and managers!’ (X59)

‘As I am a team leader I explain our collective targets to individual members of team - these are reviewed monthly and people definitely worry over not achieving their "share". I spend all of my time alleviating these worries rather than having to "beat" team members who fail to achieve individually. More time is spent negotiating targets down with senior management - this to date has been successful.’ (X60)

‘I have had to take a more detailed look at individuals’ numerical output than before. We have to recognise that the imposition of targets has gone hand in hand with substantial raising of money for the careers service. We are now able to deliver work to year groups in amounts not dreamed of in previous years, although we and schools then wanted more input. I believe that its is the balance rather than the absolute quantity which has caused the challenge; the more flexible approach now being introduced should, over time, more closely match targets with need.’ (X61)

‘Much more necessary to keep close eye on how people are coping and to make sure they have the support they need. Necessary to air problems with management, who often don’t understand the detail.’ (X62)

‘It is important to think positive, but sometimes this has been a challenge.’ (X64)

Q17 The Careers Service Performance Assessment Survey (1997) reported that ‘some careers officers find it hard to balance client need and numerical targets’. How do you do it?

‘I find it impossible to completely reconcile these 2 needs (client and target) and waver between angst at not always doing the best for the client because of the constraints of the targets and the stress of being behind with my targets and feeling one is "letting the side down" - in simple terms I do my best to meet both needs.’ (X2)

‘By being as creative as possible and working closely with our Employment Training Advisers. This is "easier " in the Labour Market [team] because of the nature of referral but Education [teams of advisers serving schools] is more problematic - very difficult to second interview. As team we also became more involved in advocacy following guidance, which we are able to fund, which helps with meeting (client) need.’ (X3)

‘I find it difficult. I have to accept I cannot do both adequately and become philosophical about it.’ (X4)

‘You would probably have to ignore one to achieve the other.’ (X5)

‘By keeping on track and not worrying about targets. Also by good relationship with educational establishments. As I said to my manager at my last appraisal I regard it as her job to let me know if I am not achieving. I achieve all my targets as I am as conscientious now as I was pre-target days.’ (X6)

‘By working hard - it is perfectly possible to achieve the targets set with co-operation of educational establishments and support of colleagues - no one can go sick!’ (X7)

‘I believe that any amount of time, however small, spent with a client is better than no time at all. I always give my clients the opportunity to see me again.’ (X8)

‘In spite of everything, I have always prided myself on giving a quality service to all my clients, perhaps over-stretching myself at times in order to reach set targets. As long as I feel satisfied, that I have done everything to the best of my ability, during a day’s work. I think it is important to keep to a set programme once this is agreed.’ (X9)

‘We muddle through in some areas (especially group work) but for interviews most clients who request one receive one!’ (X10)

‘I put client needs first; if as a result I fail to hit targets, too bad!’ (X11)

‘Trying to meet targets means cutting down the time which can be spent with individual clients. I therefore do not think that I do manage to meet all client needs other than by devoting rest time (breaks, lunchtimes) to clients.’ (X12)

‘By trying to meet the client’s need and then fiddling the figures afterwards e.g. getting a signature and doing Action Plans (claimable) afterwards. Tut, tut.’ (X13)

‘I always put client need first and would argue my case if needs be.’ (X14)

‘As a probationer I’m fortunate to have lower targets and assessment considerations ensure more emphasis on quality than quantity. However, with many years’ commercial experience, targets do not daunt me and I would hope always to be able to resist/challenge pressure to achieve targets to detriment of quality. However, again, my commercial experience enables me to provide quality guidance with practical and effective advice in, I believe, an efficient manner and I have no fears of failing to meet realistic targets!’ (X15)

‘I still put the client need first, work as hard as I can, submit my figures and await redress. We are asked every month to explain why if our targets are not met. I am usually very close to mine and work in a school where access to pupils has improved enormously in the past year so I am not usually challenged.’ (X16)

‘I don’t. I do what I can with the targets. I also do what I think best for clients. Sometimes they conflict, and I object to having to consider whether I don’t do something or do something that might conflict with client’s best interest.’ (X18)

‘I prefer to concentrate on client need wherever possible and try to fit that into the targets where I can. There is so much variety countywide, locally and in the institutions for which I’m responsible, that targets often balance out, more by luck than judgement.’ (X19)

‘Try and manage my time efficiently through keeping up to date with admin and I.T. inputting during breaks and lunchtimes and after school. I also like to be available for pupils at breaks/lunchtimes by being present in the careers library/room. (X20)

‘By doing what is achievable. Communicating with my manager if there is a problem.’ (X21)

‘View them as the same - integral part of job.’ (X23)

‘If there is no time for a POA [Plan of Action] I make notes and send it out in the post later, leaving more time for guidance and less in admin during the interview. However this goes against our Business Plan which states the POA should be issued immediately for client to take away.’ (X24)

‘The best I can.’ (X25)

‘I pass much research that I used to do for the client in to the client’s actions - I feel I fail to keep up to date with trends/personal information.’ (X26)

‘By prioritising on the clients’ need and trusting my own professional judgement on priorities. targets then remain a problem for management. e.g. I have extended interview time to allow more time to meet the needs of the client and the requirements of DfEE for action plans; the service to the client has remained the same but targets will take longer to reach or not be met - but quality to the client has not been allowed to suffer (Obviously I treat the client as the interviewee!)’ (X27)

‘I try to forget targets as I carry out my guidance work. I try to keep admin necessitated by monthly "returns" on work done, etc., to a minimum (though this is a struggle!) I discuss guidance issues with colleagues, including some from another European country, where pressures are different - all to help maintain my own sense of professionalism. I study part time in an education (rather than purely "guidance") context.’ (X28)

‘Plan work as effectively as possible. Constantly review work with key members of staff at school to ensure needs are being met. Work late! Go in to school to see people as a one off. Keep a close eye on how well targets are being met and try and instigate contingency plans if necessary.’ (X29)

‘Have become obsessed with recording contacts.’ (X30)

‘ I try to give more time to those with greatest need and give less time to those who are more "sorted".’ (X31)

‘Building good relations with staff in school - helps and influences negotiation to get numbers you need rather than what school needs. Working towards targets when negotiating whilst trying to show that you are focussing on school’s needs.’ (X32)

‘Well enough under the circumstances.’ (X33)

‘With no problems. If below on targets, devise strategies to overcome this and not worry if exceeding targets.’ (X34)

‘I do not meet numerical targets, nor I do I claim that I will be able to do so. I try to make it clear to managers, when this is the case, that the numerical targets are destructive.’ (X35)

‘I cannot complete all aspects of guidance and provision of information during a normal working day while maintaining my target of interviews.’ (X36)

‘A variety of methods; being directive to find out necessary info; "playing the game" - doing things that are not essential for you or the client, but satisfy the target setters; not meeting targets; inordinate amount of time spent on planning and frequently revising time management to meet targets.’ (X37)

‘Plan with the assistance of the Careers Co-ordinator in school. I am fortunate in that my schools are helpful. In fact they sometimes want more than is required.’ (X38)

‘Try to be extremely flexible and acknowledging that I will have to catch up on work at a later time.’ (X39)

‘Forward planning.’ (X40)

‘I don’t. Client need suffers.’ (X41)

‘ I try to produce action plans which benefit clients by giving them a meaningful summary of their interview, and a ‘menu’ of tasks they can go to achieve their goals. I try to follow guidelines so that these action plans are acceptable to Government Office.’ (X42)

‘Sometimes by arranging a further appointment, sometimes by writing action plan after interview, and posting to client.’ (X43)

‘I am realistic and realise our contractual agreement. Define client? If you mean for example the end user of our services their needs come first.’ (X44)

‘Try to meet client’s need but use what I can as "targets".’ (X45)

‘You have to prioritise very carefully who to allocate follow-up time to. Wherever possible I refer people to further information for them to research alone and send info only to those I feel need the extra help. Where possible I use the time in the interview for discussion and produce the typed plan of action later.’ (X46)

‘By working longer hours e.g. using the interview time for the client and word processing the "perfect" plan of action later.’ (X47)

‘Good question!’ (X49)

‘Constantly reviewing existing working procedures and trying to alter them to achieve targets and meet demand.’ (X50)

‘By working longer hours! i.e. giving the client the service they need/want etc and catching up afterwards.’ (X51)

‘I am self organised because I come from a positive base - a professional management Diploma.’ (X52)

‘By never having a spare minute, missing lunches and working at home.’ (X53)

‘To me, the client’s need always takes priority over numerical targets. However I am still conscious of targets and their importance. I try to maintain a realistic balance between need and targets.’ (X54)

‘My main aim is to meet the client needs, the vast majority of time this meets numerical targets. However, our clients are variable and they may not turn up for interviews, so I have to work on other targets, e.g. employer visits to show that I am still working.’ (X56)

‘At the expense of my own sanity!!’ (X57)

‘I don’t always feel that I do! In the past I did more for my clients and would like to again. I now refer more and encourage students to be more self-sufficient.’ (X58)

‘Intensive marketing of our service in the college where I work. Doing "other" things in college to maintain our credibility. Constant careers bulletins within college’s individual contact with tutors. All this in hope we can reach targets - We do actually on groupwork but not on 16-18 interviews as we see 19+ students and adults!! Attendance rate at interviews is improving and we’re getting there but all that "other" work is not recognised!’ (X59)

‘If I need to spend my time at interview with yp [young person] say listening to details of some trauma I simply do not produce an action plan - I have never worried about failing to make my targets as if I do I feel I would be able to justify - for

example if I do not achieve "placings into employment" targets I would argue that if I fail to convince the employer in the end it's out of my control.' (X60)

'Plan my work carefully so the time allocated to achieve targets is used. For the individual make sure they can access you by phone. Try and help clients to be as self sufficient as possible and use all other resources and organisations to the full.' (X62)

'Creative accounting! Being willing to bash out the required number of claimable action plans, in order to free up some time to deal with more needful clients. An additional problem is that I deal with 16-18 client group in an FE college. The near impossibility of meeting the targets for this group engenders a strong sense of "failure" and demotivation, whereas there are many clients at college outside this group e.g. mature students who need help but who are "non-productive" in target terms.' (X63)

'With difficulty. We must measure what we value but we must also value what cannot be measured.' (X64)

Appendix 4

PAGE MISSING

Appendix 5

SAMPLE Y RESPONSES IN FULL

Administered November 1998

N=12, percentages given to nearest whole number

**Where appropriate, individual responses are identified as (Y1), (Y2) etc.
Square brackets indicate explanatory note by MRM.**

		Number	Percentage %
Q1	Is your current job Full-time Part-time Job Share	12	100%

Q2	Is your current job contract Permanent Temporary	12	100%
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Q3	How long have you been in this job? 12 months or less 1 - 2 years 3 - 5 years 5 - 9 years 10 years or more	0 3 3 4 2	 25% 25% 33% 17%
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Q4	Do you hold a guidance qualification? Expect to qualify DCG Part 1 DCG Part 2 NVQ Level 4 Management, in addition to DCG	2 10 (1) (1)	17% 83%
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Q5	If you hold the DCG Parts 1 and 2, how long have you been fully qualified? 1 - 2 years 3 - 5 years 6 - 10 years 11 - 15 years 16 - 20 years 21 + years	4 1 5 0 2 0	33% 8% 42% 17%
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Q6	Which category best fits your job? Education Labour Market Manager/Team Leader	8 1 3	66% 8% 25%
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Q7	In your current job, do you have to meet imposed targets, e.g. a certain number of action plans?	Number	Percentage
	Yes	10	83%
	No	2	17%

Q8	What other kind of targets do you have to meet? (Raw figures are given as multiple answers could be given)	Number	Percentage
	Employer liaison work	5	N/a
	Delivering groupwork in school	6	
	Work with parents	4	
	Negotiating service level with school	2	
	Interviews other than Action Plan	6	
	Groupwork	6	
	Special needs interviews	2	
	Project completion	4	
	Staff development review	2	

Q9	In previous jobs, including those outside guidance, did you have to meet targets?	Number	Percentage
	Yes	7	58%
	No	5	42%

Q10	Would you say you have freedom to organise your work, for example, in allocating your time to a range of activities?	Number	Percentage
	Yes	10	83%
	Yes and No	(1)	
	No	2	16%

Q11 In general, how much would you say you value the freedom to allocate your time?

'Very important - easier in school. Able to focus on need of individual client.' (Y1)

'Very highly as this allows me to be flexible and responsive to needs of clients.'
(Y2)

'Double edged sword- without targets I have to self-motivate.' (Y4)

'Current pressures lead to being reactive not proactive.' (Y5)

'Very important to me as an individual and as a "professional".' (Y6)

'Highly value. Helps to keep motivation high.' (Y7)

'Value a great deal - difference between a professional and a technician.' (Y8)

'Very much. I feel I am in the best position to make the decisions.' (Y9)

'Greatly. The irony is that this is only possible because I am the team leader.' (Y10)

'Very highly. It makes me feel valued and trusted to do the job.' (Y11)

'Highly.' (Y12)

Q12 Do you view targets as a useful framework for organising your work?

	Number	Percentage
Yes	8	66%
No	4	34%

Three 'Yes' answers were qualified;

'Fairly useful but too rigidly applied.' (Y1)

'May be useful in strategically planning but not around dealing with individual clients.' (Y6)

'Yes, but not the only one.' [performance indicator that is useful] (Y11)

Q13 Do you feel that meeting targets has affected the way you deliver guidance?

	Number	Percentage
Yes	12	100%
No		

If 'Yes', how would you describe the effects of targets on the way you deliver guidance?

'With reference to career action plans - targets imposed define that for every guidance interview there should be a CAP [careers action plan] - very difficult if client undecided/no ideas/vocationally not ready- but feel the need to push to make a decision- technical rationality. Often feel paper-pushing, target meeting exercise.' (Y1)

'I feel obliged to complete careers action plan even if I don't think client needs/wants it.' (Y2)

'Dominates interview - over rides their [client] needs and wants.' (Y3)

'To meet targets you need to be organised - this is a problem in a badly organised school and so leads to tension again.' (Y4)

'Sausage machine. It's made me think more careful [sic] about the way I deliver things, as my time is so valuable and schools are aware of this. However, job satisfaction has diminished.' (Y5)

'You work the interview to ensure all the criteria (quality) is [sic] met whether appropriate or not.' (Y6)

'Interviews are more structured...however this results in more structured outputs.' (Y7)

'I steer the agenda to fit the process required- though may not be on the agenda for the client I am interviewing.' (Y8)

'I do not really place any great importance on them- but there again I have never failed to deliver! In previous job (sales) non- meeting of targets = no job.' (Y9)

'Recent research carried out by our TEC [Training and Enterprise Council] has shown that client sometimes feel that their guidance needs are not always being met due to our needs.' (Y10)

'Quantitive [sic] targets have often been manipulated to allow me to achieved [sic] better results.' (Y11)

Q14 Do you consider targets an appropriate tool to measure the work you do?

	Number	Percentage
Yes	1	9%
No	11	91%

**What other measures would you welcome in addition to numerical targets?
n = 12, raw figures given as multiple answers possible.**

Tracking/added value	6
Client Feedback, soft indicators	5
Peer coaching	3
Mentor/staff appraisal	3
Meaningful quality measures	1
Additional work, e.g. projects	1

'Often quantity over rides quality.

Tracking systems- what impact made?

Assessment by peers, managers.

Feedback questionnaires from clients.

But, these very difficult as if assessing peers who are longstanding careers advisers, very difficult to constructively criticise.' (Y1)

[MRM note; this respondent had been qualified between 1 and 2 years.]

'Quantity could mean delivering lots of crap - how does this help client?' (Y4)

'Emphasis now placed on meeting targets above quality of guidance - maybe with managers being really unaware of the issues facing practitioners.' (Y5)

Q15 How would you say the introduction of targets has affected your motivation and general morale?

	Number	Percentage
Positive effect	1	8%
No effect	2	17%
Detrimental	9	75%

'Haven't known any different as only been in the job just over 2 years. But, looking at longer serving staff, the large majority feel fairly demotivated, see them more as

an imposition - but they always had targets even though now reaching them meets the contract.' (Y1)

'Less motivated as people who are crap at guidance can still meet their targets and be seen to be performing. I resent employer work as now I have to do some much of it and have never particularly enjoyed most of the visits I do. Some are fine - loads just to meet the target is demoralising.' (Y2)

'Because of the lack of "ownership" of targets because they are prescribed and because they do not reflect the actual work needed to be done with different clients and stakeholders (usually much greater) my morale has been adversely affected in the sense that I don't feel my managers or DfEE place enough value (expressed in terms of time) on my work. My motivation is occasionally affected, especially relating the to the company "culture" but I'm generally highly motivated as a person anyway.' (Y3)

'They are useful tool. It can be a pain when everyone gets overly uptight about them. Not a problem.' (Y4)

'Went through a very bad time, but now looks like targets may be relaxed and staff come up for a breather. Morale is low generally - particularly due to the management system and looks unlikely to change. Motivation remains in spite of, not because of the present system.' (Y5)

'I have always worked in jobs where targets are integral to the job. However, there has always been a tangible link to the work I did and income generation, and not as an indicator of quality and amount of work done! The CS targets seem to be an attempt to justify the work we do and I feel they are very poor indicators of the work we do with clients. This leads to a feeling of being undervalued and de-skilled - the ap [action plan] is the product and outcome not impartial guidance to assist clients to move on and work towards reaching their goals.' (Y6)

'Targets have helped to show individual contribution to company so helped with motivation. Supportive management so few problems with morale.' (Y7)

'The targets don't affect my motivation, the process to achieve them does - again referring to the agenda/criteria used for recording and action planning.' (Y8)

'Not the targets as such but the job security situation now during the privatisation phases was very concerning - also there is still the phrase 'operational requirement' in use. What if you are not need/wanted because the goal posts have moved again?' (Y9)

'Where realistic and sensible can help to motivate; where you can't see the point from a guidance point of view have opposite effect. Having said that when the jobs of team members depends on achieving targets and maximising income - this is a great incentive.' (Y10)

'It is disheartening as it seems too narrowly focussed and these targets don't show recognition of the impact made and the breadth of work. Managers now tend to focus on targets rather than look at the whole area of work as being important.' (Y11)

'Some concerns in the beginning but feel staff are more receptive, happy with targets in terms of achieving them. Unhappy about NOT being able to see - 36% P16 as opposed to 100%.' (Y12) **[MRM note; the respondent is referring to the Re-focusing of the Careers Service, which took effect in Autumn 1999. As greater emphasis was placed on work with disaffected clients, services to Post 16 clients were greatly reduced.]**

Q16 If you manage others, how would you say the introduction of targets has affected the way you manage?

- 1) Helped to put structure to management and encourage use of regular reviews to check on progress or highlight potential problems.
- 2) Helps to highlight staff contribution. (Y7)

'No. When we are appraised twice each year by team leaders we are measured by meeting our targets not on how we meet our targets - the 'extra' we put in. Feel the width, not the quality.' (Y8)

'I don't - but my team leader accepts that some team members will overproduce and others under produce - it seems there are no rewards or sanctions for either and this can be a cause of resentment.' (Y9)

'Staff understand the pressure to see as many as possible to maximise income. Heavy commitments (necessary in order to do this) can make them feel under pressure - less time available for professional development, admin, training, reading etc.' (Y10)

'Over reaching targets is a problem and it is hard to explain to school that last year 100% of Post 16 seen, this year 30% because of work with disaffected.' (Y12)

Q17 The Careers Service Performance Assessment Survey (1997) reported that 'some careers officers find it hard to balance client need and numerical targets'. How do you do it?

'With extreme difficulty! I personal [sic] see the targets as a secondary concern and aim to meet the clients' need first - if targets are met via doing this, all the better. Also, to balance both, means that I have to undertake work at home in 'personal time' in order to meet the numerical targets.' (Y1)

'Numerical targets are more important. I work in college and in theory the target is 30% of the client group - but I find I have to interview everyone I can find on my courses to meet my targets. But within that context I do the interviews as well as I can.' (Y2)

- 1) Deliver the work, but I count it in 'creative' ways
- 2) Spend considerable additional time e.g. work weekend and evenings
- 3) Prioritise, reject additional work which isn't a target, especially developmental work. (Y3)

'Be organised - get on well with careers co-ordinator and school. This can give you the flexibility to meet client needs. I was never was willing to do everything for all clients only for the few who appeared to really need it.' (Y4)

'With difficulty, e.g. where 90% of 6th form request interview, target 30%, have to look at group interviewing.' (Y5)

'With difficulty - something has to give - usually client needs. Managers check your monthly stats, no the quality of guidance given - action plans too cumbersome a tool to measure the work we do.' (Y6)

'Put client need first. Work can often be skewed to fit targets. Made decision that although targets need to be met it is more important to look at what work needs to be done and then see how targets can fit into this.' (Y7)

'Balance- meet the targets as required deal with client needs/issues as necessary.' (Y8)

'I don't put quality time into the targets but I do put quality into the client. I have never felt that action plans are for the client - so quickly complete them and in a way feel they are the "price I have to pay" for interviewing the client.' (Y9)

'By working harder and if I'm honest by sometimes not giving the level of service I'd like to give. Pressure of dual roles (manager who still has caseload) causes me the most pressure.' (Y10)

'I have manipulated the targets but subsequently found that this just hid the real problems I was facing.' (Y11)

'With difficulty. Need to prioritise who will be seen, see in groups etc. Need to work closely with school staff.' (Y12)

Appendix 6

COMBINED X AND Y SAMPLE

This compilation comprises statistical data which can be tabulated. For responses to open questions, please see the separate data records for each sample.

N = 76

Q1	Is your current job	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	Percentage
	Full-time	57	12	69	91%
	Part-time	7	0	7	9%
	Job Share	0	0	0	

Q2	Is your current job contract	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	Percentage
	Permanent	61	12	73	96%
	Temporary	3	0	3	4%

Q3	How long have you been in this job?	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	Percentage
	12 months or less	10	0	10	13%
	1 - 2 years	12	3	15	20%
	3 - 5 years	23	3	26	34%
	5 - 9 years	8	4	12	16%
	10 years or more	11	2	13	17%

Q4	Do you hold a guidance qualification?	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	Percentage
	Expect to qualify	6	0	6	8%
	DCG Part 1	9	2	11	15%
	DCG Part 2	47	10	57	75%
	NVQ Level 4	1	0	1	1%
	Other NVQ5 & Dip. in Management	1	(1)	1	1%

Q5	I you hold the DCG Part 1 and 2, how long have you been fully qualified?	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	Percentage
	1 - 2 years	21	4	25	33%
	3 - 5 years	11	1	12	16%
	6 - 10 years	7	5	12	16%
	11 - 15 years	5	0	5	7%
	16 - 20 years	2	2	4	5%
	21 + years	1	0	1	1%

Q6	Which category best fits your job?	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	Percentage
	Education	35	8	43	57%
	Labour Market	8	1	9	12%
	Elements of both	4	0	4	5%
	Manager/Team Leader	17	3	20	26%

Q7	In your current job, do you have to meet imposed targets, e.g. a certain number of action plans?	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	Percentage
	Yes	61	10	71	93%
	No	3	2	5	7%

Q8	What other kind of targets do you have to meet? (Raw figures are given as multiple answers could be given)	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure
	Delivering groupwork in school	38	6	44
	Employer liaison work	30	5	35
	Work with parents	28	4	32
	Negotiating service level with school	18	2	20
	Placing clients into work/training	10		10
	Training (own development)	5		5
	Internal quality e.g. database accuracy	3		3
	Training colleagues/staff review	4	2	6
	Interviews other than Action Plan/Special Needs	17	8	25
	Groupwork		6	6
	Project completion		4	4

Q9	In previous jobs, did you have to meet targets?	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	%
	Yes	29	7	36	47%
	No	35	5	40	53%

Q10	Would you say you have freedom to organise your work?	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	%
	Yes	46	10	56	74%
	No	13	2	15	20%
	Both Yes and No	2		2	3%
	No response	3		3	3%

Q12	Do you view targets as a useful framework?	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	%
	Yes	36	8	44	59%
	No	25	4	29	39%
	Not applicable	3		3	2%

Q13	Do you feel meeting targets has affected the way you deliver guidance?	Sample X	Sample Y	Total figure	%
	Yes	55	12	67	88%
	No	6	0	6	8%
	Not applicable	3		3	4%

Appendix 7

PAGE MISSING

Appendix 8

Practitioner Interview; Edited Transcript
Conducted January 6th 1999

Rachel Mulvey – plain text.
Practitioner - italics.

... the idea is that I get from you is some deeper level of understanding of comments that were made on the questionnaires.

Right.

So just to emphasise once again that it's just my personal study it's not written up for any person who's directing the way the research goes.

Since the conference...

January, wasn't it?

January the 9th, it's almost a year to the day, the targets for action plans and group work and so on have been dropped, I think, in favour of the points tariff.

Yes and No.

Right. How has that been?

Right, yes the points tariff has been introduced; it's not complete yet, it's going to be more substantive. The next one actually is April but yes it has been introduced. Yes there has been ... we have been able to make use of that, to score points off in one area where we've maybe not achieved but we haven't hit the target which was set.

Yes.

But we've been able to compensate for that in other areas. Having said that, it's still very, very much target driven. Call it points, you can call it what you like, but we've still got the overall target and that still has to be met, and that's unrealistic in certain areas.

Is the points tariff by company or is it broken down by area or even by office as far as {the local Government office} is concerned?

It's broken down by company but we are able to apply it on a local basis.

Yeah.

It's sort of on an area basis.

And do you experience the targets as personal or office?

They're office and then they're group. We still don't have personal targets not in this office....it maybe that if you went to other offices (in Careers Company X) they'd be encouraged to do it that way, but company-wise it's the office that has the target. And then it's the labour market and the education team that we have separate targets.

OK. One things that came through on the questionnaire was people had found that they were having to do more in the same amount of time, in terms of doing the interview and the action plan for example, you know, within that same space of time. What do you make of those kinds of comments?

What me personally?

Yeah.

What, how do I feel about that?

Well not necessary how you fit into the category, but what do you make of that?

Yeah, I would say I could recognise all of those quite definitely and I think it really depends on your attitude as to where you fall. I would say personally that I like to fall completely with the last one but I wouldn't consider that to be appropriate really.

Why not appropriate?

You're actually paid to do a job, at the end of the day so, I couldn't say 'your can stuff your target'. This is what I actually believe. I do actually believe very much that guidance should be client driven, and I hope never to go away from that. But, there is always a target. I would say that, again speaking personally, that because I work in the labour market, I feel lucky in it at one sense because we do have an hour for our interviews, we do have to have the action plans, the submissions, the application forms etc. done in that time so, it is a lot. I think you have to be quite experienced to be able to deal with that. You have to be very, very organised to do that and you do have to drive the interview.

And keep it to an agenda that's then going to be, sort of, claimable.

That's right, but I prefer to see it as keeping it to a very strong structure, rather than being... what's the word, sorry, being directive.

Yeah.

I try not to be directive, but I think I would probably say that we were.

You'd see it as being an agenda that you've got to get through....

Yes.

....and hopefully you'd be experienced enough to do that in a way that didn't mean that the client's agenda was knocked out the window

That's right.

Is that easy, I mean, you say ...

No, absolutely not again particularly with the sort of clients ... I work completely in the labour market now, the sort of clients can have all sorts of problems surrounding them obviously.

Exactly.

A lot of the things that might affect them in the labour market we have to know about 'cos they will affect what the outcome is.

There's more data to gather in a sense.

Yeah. You have got to concentrate on the outcome. There's got to be an outcome. There's got to be a movement forward, you've got to have that in the labour market.

So, a positive outcome would be, as you say, some movement forward from baseline, so you're doing some assessment of where the client is now...

You have to come away knowing what that is... we can't help them until we've got that. We can't put them on our register because that's part of our criteria.

Can I just go into this a little bit more about what would satisfy, you know, I call it a positive outcome?... Is that what you would call it? You said there's got to be some movement...

Yeah.

Some progression.

Yeah, positive outcome is fine.

What that was...

Yes, exactly.

Yes and no. Yes, we've got a lot more scope than they do in Employment Services, 'cos it's very clear. On the other hand, in the labour market, you do have to put those young people on the register or make the decision or make the decision that they don't go on the register.

Right, and the register is actively seeking.

Yes, that may involve having to claim benefit. If they have to claim benefit, they have to follow certain rules, so that has to be very directive.

Yes.

We try and keep the guidance in there but it has a very, very directive framework. Total client driven, what I call at the moment, total client driven guidance, to young people who can't and who aren't claiming benefit, we can very much make that decision whether they go on the register or not and still give them an action plan and still claim it. With the young people coming to us who have to claim benefit, we have to follow the framework; we don't have any choice.

Yeah.

And that can be very restrictive if we're talking in purely ... guidance.

Yeah.

If you can concentrate on how we can rationalise it, if you can concentrate on the fact that the need of this young person is that, then that is the guidance. I mean, a lot of people will say to us 'don't you find it boring, when you're always doing the same thing?' but I personally don't see it that way.

But, it wouldn't be targets that made it boring?

Oh no, not at all, not at all.

That would be the process of guidance.

Absolutely.

I did...

I think we might have got away from the question.

It's still OK because it's sort of how you deal with the targets and, you know, I am interested in how you deal with targets within the guidance profession, because I assume that guidance professionals have a shared value system which I think they do have.

They do have, yeah.

(LAUGHTER)

I think you find it more and more difficult to find confirmation of that. I think there's a very grave danger that we're moving very fast away from that.

Yes, you see what I'm hoping is that, not my research in particular, but all research in general fostering research culture enables practitioners to articulate, you know, but...

But that takes you down the road of ... that the education and training's not going that way, it's completely the opposite.

But that does take us away from my research question.

Do you think there's been any positive effects within the target culture?

Overall..., I would say no. I can see that there is an accountability, but the trade-off of that is that you've got a target which is meaningful and that the guidance is less than it should be. I don't accept that ...maybe, I would actually say the assumption that the client should take responsibility. I understand that ..., they should take responsibility but it's my experience, as a practitioner, as a parent actually, as it goes, that if you don't do a lot of those things for young people, there's no way that their going to do that. It doesn't work that way, unless they're presented with having to make a decision about it, they don't make it. Let's not pretend that it's not true, 'cos they don't, and generally speaking they will put it off. It's as simple as that. I understand, particularly in education people do that and practitioners who would have given a lot of information, no longer do that and that's definitely because of the target. There's no doubt that that's the cause of it. They don't have the time to do it. They are in school far more. They've got to do more interviews in the day and, as you say, we started off my saying they've got to do all the action plans etc. They simply don't have the time to get all the information out if it's immediately available, let alone, research it, which is what people always did. I believe it's detrimental quite definitely because, I know for a fact, the young people will not do it. It might be spoon-feeding, it might be all of that, but you have to make that decision of whether – if you give it to them, is it likely that they'll read it at all, ever or, if you don't do it, the one thing that's absolutely certain is that they never will. That's a bit assumption. There's a 99.9% chance that they won't even think about it ever again 'til they come back to someone else in years to come and have the same interview and talk through the same things. Because we see that particularly when young people come from university or they drop out, particularly when they drop out because we're not supposed to see them after university anyway. They come here and you know that it's like talking to someone in Year 11, you know, I'm not being rude about them...

You mean in terms of career maturity?

They haven't moved one single inch.

But that's because circumstances have permitted them not to.

Certainly, they've not had to..., they've never had to make a decision. There's nothing wrong with that, it just proves the point.

So for clients you wouldn't see it serving any benefit? For practitioners?

I suppose maybe for some, in some areas, that it has encouraged people to be ...I take the point about working together as a unit, and you could interpret it that way... With regard to teamwork, I think it's very, very detrimental. People feel very, very stressed by it. They can't find a rationale for it.

I'm tempted to ask you this question because I know you've got an understanding of management theory. What about in terms of the organisation, do you think the organisation has had any benefit from it?

Obviously ..., yeah. Because you're talking about figures and statistics in boxes and that from that point of view.

Yeah.

That's why I wavered in the middle, because I can see the rationale and I accept that. You have to have some kind of accountability. I wouldn't call it a target, but it has to be in some form or other in order for the organisation to be successful. Because, let's face it, careers organisations weren't – they didn't have to be. Whatever money they asked for, they either got it or they didn't. It didn't really matter how they performed.

Yes, it was just up to the LEA.

Absolutely. My argument is not with the fact that they are becoming more accountable, more organised in the business sense, which is totally different, it's the fact that are they offering a service... what it was before. The organisation must gain from it in a statistical sense, not in a resource sense.

But statistical and perhaps financial?

Yeah. You've got your information to justify...etc. etc., but it can be used as a stick and it is.

Can you think of other measures that you think could be more appropriate? You said you've got no problem with accountability. What would you present, or like to be seen ... as evidence of the work done.

Ah well. That depends on the interpretation of what careers guidance is I guess.

Yeah, so tell me.

You're asking me as a professional to do what professionals do, do we criticise and say that's no good. We don't like to put our hand on heart and say that what we should do, do we?

I find that question difficult to answer. My own judgement is progression, moving on is meeting the need of the client which is not the way an organisation can necessarily approach that. That's difficult. All I know for sure is that the targets are too crude. I agree with that. They're based on group psychology which is rubbish because we're talking about individual; you can't judge them on that basis. They're based on all the things that we're taught as an adviser on the theory side based on a maturity that's the same for everyone and all of those things that put individuals in a mass it's not ...you have to judge it on an individual basis and I'm not really sure there is a way of doing that, which is why they went for the target. I understand the theory behind that as well. I don't know the answer to it. A cop out.

I'll give you some help.

OK. You could have done that to me in the beginning.

I could. It's so much more interesting to hear your intellectual faculties ...

(Shared laughter)

grasping with what I consider to be an essential feature in this kind of research.

...doing long-term tracking over a client; peer feedback; parental feedback

We see a lot of parents actually.

So, do you think any of those would be useful?

They'd probably all be useful. The best ones on the surface would appear to be client satisfaction, long term tracking's different ... The trouble that I would always find with client satisfaction – it's a bit like the old ..., the questionnaire, 'I've done this, I don't want to answer questions, how many times are you going to ask me this?' Which, quite often has the opposite effect.

Yeah.

You want it..., you'll get it then. I'm not sure that you get a clear picture. Having said that, we do have to do all that kind of thing like, (tape unclear). So we do use that kind of benchmark, that kind of feedback. I'm not sure how satisfactory it is and I feel that's what the accountants would say isn't it.

Yes definitely. You said the long-term tracking ... but maybe we'll come back to that.

Well, my own personal belief is that long-term tracking is the only way you can ever tell whether guidance works. I'm not sure if you can ever prove it... It's the argument if someone's successful, it's always their decision and a good careers guidance adviser..., that should be OK.

Yeah.

Because if they remember that you encouraged them to do that, then you've been directive and you haven't....., it's got to come out and it's got to be their decision.

Yes, yes.

It's difficult.

So, you think that would be ..., that would have some mileage?

I think you've got to try it. They, of course would say like all longitudinal studies, it's expensive. How can you justify it etc. etc. Because you're talking about Government at the end of the day, changes in Government, changes in ideas, I don't know. Longitudinal yeah, it's always quite a good research tool.

You rolled your eyes a bit about staff feedback, peer feedback.

Yeah, I know.

I couldn't catch that on tape.

(Shared laughter)

It's not something that I feel is very appropriate actually. I'm not sure that this particular profession is ready for that ...

That's interesting.

Strange really. Because..., as careers advisers, we are all quite used to that for very long periods of time – when you're training. We are actually quite used to it because we access other people as well.

What... as part of appraisal or..?

Yeah, as part of D32 or D33, ongoing training in house and so on, but I haven't actually met a professional who likes it very much.

When you said 'we're not as a profession ready for it'. Do you think other professions...

Well, I don't know, 'cos I can't speak for them but I certainly don't think this profession likes it very much. There are some people who say 'oh yeah we'll do it', but I would say that that's not true. I would say that they would find an alternative way of dealing with that – which won't be peer assessment. They feel uncomfortable with it. I'm not sure if you can identify why but that's going into psychology. I think people would feel, in my opinion, uncomfortable.

So we're saying.... you're saying no problem with accountability, that the quantitative culture at the moment is a measure but a crude one, that others would be useful things like client satisfaction, which you are already doing, long-term tracking, feedback from stake-holders really, parents and stuff and so on.

Yeah.

All of those would be useful in theory but you can't see it happening in practice.

I think you need all of those. It's the quantifiable bit..., what do you measure it against? How do you measure that?

It's movements from baseline.

Something that we've pushed for very hard, if you take the area of special needs for example, it's probably a very good area to put that forward. For young people in that situation, for a lot of our clients who need help and support to get to NVQ level one, at the moment things are beginning to change but just now, currently, that's not funded. It's very difficult to get funding for it. Now, that would be a way of measuring for those young people, in a much, much better way than any action plan would. Because they've got to have this hard-core on paper, action plan, which may not be appropriate for their situation and it maybe that they can't read it and right, you can talk about all the different media's you can put it in, but it's your outcome.

It maybe what they're going to do..., I'm not saying that you put your actions in, I don't mean it that way, a truthful action.

Your preference.

But it's your preference. They don't want it and they don't need it. We can talk again about having (tape unclear). It would be very interesting and I would put money on the outcome of a questionnaire that says 'Do you ever look at your action plan again, ever?' 'Please answer truthfully, yes or no?'

But that's a different question isn't it from 'Do you remember anything from your interview?'

Totally, totally different yeah. That's why they don't always ask the same question do they?

No, no. Yes, I do think that's a very interesting point, the difference there between what the action plan means to the client as opposed to what the interview means to the client.

We're under no illusions about that but ... I think part of that is because certainly here, is that we have to do the action plan as part of the process...

It's integral to the interview...

Because it's seen as the only way that ownership is given ... There are areas where they've interpreted that in a different way and they take the information back and type up the action plans, and it maybe that the action plan, the physical piece of paper is actually valued more in that situation – I don't know.

That's the debate that's raged long before, you know, action plans had this particular equation with money.

Yeah.

We looked at accountability. I wonder if I could just take you back slightly to one of the ..., this issue of having to manage targets, which you said were not achievable or realistic ...

I didn't feel that they weren't though.

Yes, I see there's a difference between that. So, trying to achieve targets with restricted resources, you know like I talked about people doing more work at home and that type of thing, can I ask you to just consider a couple of scenarios – which are all really schools-based. Is that OK?

I haven't worked there for two years now – so it would be second-hand.

Right, OK thanks. So if it's completely impossible, please say.

Well I was a supervisor for (a newly qualified practitioner in his probationary year), so he just finished this year, last summer so from that point of view...

Right, OK. So, if you imagine that in a school, it works just as well in duty in a office, I guess: You've got a lunch-time drop-in session of an hour, you realise there are about 9 kids, all hoping to catch you. You take the first one into the careers room and it becomes clear that's its going to take the best part of the hour to deal with that one client. What do you do?

What would I do? I'd make them an appointment. I'd speak to them and explain to them that obviously this is going to take longer. I wouldn't leave the other 8 kids outside.

Right.

It's a drop-in that's about being quite clear what it's for.

That's OK. It's not a question of right or wrong answers, it's just interesting to see different approaches OK?

If you're not going to meet the need of that client in that time, because you're going to feel pressurised and they might open up and then you might have something much bigger than you've ever dreamed of come out of that and the people outside aren't going to be happy. They're going to go back and say 'well that was a waste of time, etc. etc.' So you've lost so much.

So, you try to be fair to everybody?

Yeah but you're trying to be realistic and practical as well. That way, everyone will get an outcome. It may be that that person really needs to see you and you need to judge that but it can't be then.

Yeah, right.

Another one, you're in a school with a colleague who its clear has been on sick leave and now this is going to be extended.

Sharing a school?

Yeah sharing a school...and the school is insisting that the partnership agreement is met. How are you going to manage that?

(Practitioner laughter)

You've been there haven't you?

How would I manage that? Well, I'd need to take that apart again really.

If you've got part responsibility for a school and someone is long-term sick, then you have to make it quite clear that you can't meet the other half.

Make it clear to?

It would have to be your own manager who would then need to speak to the school.

Right.

You'd have to do that... they have to be quite clear what is happening. My view of that would be that the company has to do something about it and they have to find someone else. Their contract is with the school – you're just the deliverer and I mean that in inverted commas.

You're the agent.

You're very much a part of it but it isn't your job to find an answer to that problem and maybe it's not even your manager's job but it's the company's job to find out that or to help you meet with the school to explain the situation. They shouldn't put the careers adviser in the position where they have to say "well I'm terribly sorry but I can't do this" because it's not them that can't do it.

You're saying it's the organisation.

Absolutely. You've got to be in a very positive relationship with the school. So that's the first thing that you'd have to say to them. Why are you smiling?

Well, I'm smiling because it's so clear that you've got an organisational frame of reference.

No, don't be sorry at all. I'm delighted.

I've structured my session with structures.

But many people would say in response to that, well I'd get someone to cover or I'd ask a colleague ...

We've all tried that and it doesn't work.

So, that's while I'm smiling. To me it's a ... to me the obvious answer is that it's an organisational issue.

I would feel that ... I would go through all those feelings of guilt but you can't live that way. And I'd still feel guilty, even when I'd done it. But you have to hold onto the fact that you're not.

It goes back to the coping mechanisms – this is what I can do, but this is what I cannot do.

Because otherwise, as sure as anything, you'll be the next person off – with stress.

Absolutely.

And yours could last a lot longer – you don't know.

Exactly.

OK, last scenario – you've got a practitioner in training who's on placement in one of your schools, you've seen the student deliver some very effective group work and then you discover that they've actually got a teaching background, a qualified teacher status. Could you use that student to help you meet group work targets?

What if someone comes from college on a ...

Yes exactly that someone's doing their Dip. C. G.

Oh no, absolutely not.

But could you?

People do, I'm sure, but I don't feel that's professional – they're not employed by you. That's not what they're there for. If they are willing and they want to experience to assist you, that's different but it should be on the basis that they are assisting you and learning by it. It shouldn't be meeting your target. In other words, you should be able to meet that target without them being there.

So you would say that even though you've got no doubt this student is capable and willing and able, you could even envisage the student designing and delivering a piece of group work with you in the classroom, but it would be you supervising that student and that he or she were supernumerary – they weren't doing it instead of you.

Absolutely. They are there... It doesn't matter they could be a brain surgeon or teacher they could be careers adviser that did training 40 years ago, its irrelevant. What's relevant is what they're there for and they are there to learn and to get work experience. Yeah, they've got to participate – as part of their objective and if that means them designing and driving it then that's fine. The responsibility has got to be yours. You've got to make sure that they want to do that. They must not meet your target – of course they can help you – they can do any of those things if they wish to do it, but its got to be with discussion with them and at the end of day if they

say no, you've got to have my group work ready to deliver, then it's as simple as that.

There's obviously some students who will want to and be quite capable of doing it all and obviously you encourage that but that's the other side of the training but that shouldn't be seen as an excuse for you to go off and do your own thing.

So it's enrichment rather than ... the icing on the cake.

Yes, absolutely.

OK, that the end of the scenarios. There's just a few more questions. One professional commented that there's no reward if targets are met and no sanction if they're not met. Now, I wonder what you think about that?

There is a sanction if they're not met.

Which is?

You don't get so much money.

Who, you personally?

No the company – doesn't get so much money.

Right.

But, it maybe that that person hasn't experienced that yet.

Well, I think they meant it at an individual level – there was one example – was given in an office where one office had met targets, another office had not. The office that was under-achieving was paid over-time to meet the targets. That was the scenario that was given. This was experienced by the people who had met the targets as being 'bonkers'. That people who had not, had been paid more to catch up.

That's bad management isn't it? Isn't it?

(Laughter)

So, you're clear that that's bad management?

Yeah, in my own mind – yes absolutely. Yes I'm 100% sure that that's the reason for that. You could take that further and say that the reason the targets were not met is bad management and I agree with that too. 'Cos at the end of the day, you can go all the way up to the person who negotiates the contract and if the targets are unrealistic, then it's their fault. Or, if the office fails to meet the target, ..., I won't say fault, ...it's someone's responsibility to make sure that doesn't happen.

Right.

And if the targets are unrealistic, then someone down the line should come clean and say “OK, these are unrealistic – and they can get stuffed there’s no way we can meet them” or “these are unrealistic, what the hell are we going to do?” What strategies can we put in place to say “that we’ve tried and what can we realistically do?” That’s really what we do here.

So, you have a clear argument for what’s gone wrong.

It’s a question of recognising what the issues are.

Yeah, and then dealing with them.

I was just going to say that we look at the targets at the beginning and we’d say then – you know, there’s no way or we can do this if because in order to get the staff, you have to justify the end.

Though it’s not that you can’t meet them because there are ways to meet them, but this is the only way you can meet them if we don’t have 3 more staff. If you over-achieve then there’s something else working.

Exactly, absolutely. Can I just check with you, you know when you said there are ways to achieve them. Do you mean by throwing more resources at it or being more creative in your reporting.

Oh we don’t go for that in (this careers company).

Oh I’m sure you don’t.

It’s important enough to meet the target. It’s a bit difficult to look in the abstract really. My way to approach is would be this: That you look at what the need is, that’s what you lobby for. We always try and do, it doesn’t always work obviously, but that’s what we try and do and I can only really speak personally for this office because I’ve worked quite a while. We do that in education and the labour market and that’s the way we lobby and our team leaders, we set our own budgeting targets on that and then we get back from the company what we’ve got to do. We hope that they’re quite close...

Manoeuvring in the middle

If there is a big different then we would need... in other words, higher, much higher, then we’d either be saying either “we can’t or if you expect us to do that then we have to have this”

But the local management is crucial in that

Absolutely crucial, yeah and even more so now because of flat management because there’s this huge gap where there is...

Between strategy and operation. Can I just press you on this sanction reward, I mean, how would you feel about the idea of sanctions individually. For other individuals who don't meet targets without a clear rationale or reward for people who do meet targets either individually or in small teams?

Personally, I think it would be greatest thing since sliced bread.

That's 'cos your confident you can meet those targets.

(Shared laughter)

Oh no, I'm being slightly flippant. I understand that it's good but overall year after year, I think I would have to look at it a bit altruistically and have to mention about things like IIP. It doesn't work and if you've got things like stress at work, when you have to weigh it up long-term, we all know that there are problems all round...There is a feeling from some people ... let's use the word emotional rather than anything...about the fact that they are working extremely hard when other people are ill. Stress is a very difficult thing both for the people who suffers it and for the people who have to deal with the ramifications...

Yes, absolutely.

...and I've lost my train of thought now.

Deeply emotional, altruism.

Oh, about rewards wasn't it?

Mmmm.

You have to look at that as well. So, no you can't go for rewards or sanctions. You have to go for supporting individuals but I think people equally have to be quite sure that the targets have to be met. That's the company policy, this is what we are being paid for and, at the end of the day, you're getting paid for it. You're not getting paid to be an altruistic, caring person, you're not, you're being paid to deliver ... to do a job of work.

Absolutely.

It's as simple as that. If you don't like it you don't do it. That's the bottom line. How you deal with that is completely different. If you're being paid to do a job and you're not doing the job properly, then you've got to find out the reasons for that and you've got to support someone through that and you've got the disciplinary procedure, and the grievance procedure, and although people who have met the targets and feel that they have worked extremely hard to do that, they don't know the other persons problems, situation, scenarios etc. etc., so you can't comment on them. I have worked for companies that gave merit reviews and they were great because I was gone... but it is very divisive, at a time when people do feel very stressed anyway.

Equally, when you've met the targets that other offices haven't, that is very, very divisive and very very hard for people to take as well. They feel very, very bitter because they do feel, back to the person who commented before, there is no reward for people doing the job properly.

It's felt deeply.

Oh yeah. It really is a very emotive subject but I have heard more and more people say "I'm going to do the work and I'm going to do the job that I'm paid for".

The minimum, contract compliance.

I know people will say a lot about working at home, obviously there still are people who do that, but my own opinion would be that there are far less. I wouldn't do it.

No.

I'd never be like that in my life.

But you have done in the past?

Oh at home, yeah but I wouldn't do it anymore.

Even if that reduces client quality?

Working at home wouldn't have anything to do with client quality. What people do at home is the administration. What you do at home has nothing to do with client quality.

Except, if you'd got some time marked out for admin. in the office , and you gave that time over to a client,.....for example.

Yes, but I wouldn't do the admin. at home.

Right, you would make that happen at work?

Absolutely. It's your old office scenario, you know, What's that game?, you do it on the diploma courses as well. It's a time management exercise. You go into the office and this is your 'In tray' ...

But in fact that goes back to your comment about being very organised and being very clear about what is work and what's outside work.

If you don't, it's very stressful for all of us and that goes across the board in work as well. If you're not like that then you will have stress 'cos you will be doing more than you can cope with. The difficulty is to realise that and just switch off to it and to not feel guilty, particularly in this profession because we're all supposed to care so much. It's like people say about the nurses and things like that...you've not right to go on strike,...but of course they have they've got the same rights as everyone else.

Because it's a caring profession doesn't mean to say that they don't suffer from guilt and jealousy does it?

I absolutely agree with you.

Very last question. If you had two minutes to speak to (the local Government Office). What message would you want to get across to them?

I don't know. I don't think they know what we do. I don't think that's changed.

They don't really know what guidance is?

No. I don't know what I'd say to them.

But, it would be something around that?

Yeah. But it doesn't work that way does it? You can't lobby in that way, it's got to be somewhere else.

It's really been tremendously helpful giving all this time.

Good, I've enjoyed it.

Well, I'm glad I kept the tape on.

Appendix 9

Focus Group 1; Edited Transcript
Conducted January 6th 1999

Rachel Mulvey - plain text.
Individual contributors - italics.

Please note that contributors are identified in this transcript, but by pseudonym, to preserve confidentiality. Where people in the group refer to each other by name, this has been changed to the pseudonym.

[] One of the things that has happened is that... at the time that I administered the questionnaire, you were working under a target system and since then, that's been moved to a points tariff system. (Derek joins the group late and finds a seat). Hello Derek, Hi. Nice to meet you.

We haven't really noticed the effect of the points system. No difference whatsoever. (Carol)

Well, I've got to be honest, it hasn't made any difference whatsoever we're still working really to target. (Barbara)

Right, and you'd all feel that?

Well we have been piloted in our office. We are doing this spreadsheet where you get so many points but, to be honest, it's not made any difference to our working conditions. (Ann)

Right.

We still have got our monthly profile, our school profile to do so...(Ann)

Right.

Regards targets, we are still going for targets, but we can see in our office how the points system is working. (Ann)

Right so you can see it working, but it doesn't feel like it's made any difference?

No it's not really made a great difference. (Ann)

Right O.K. Derek if we could just quickly?

Yeah sure. (Derek)

Im here in my capacity as a PhD student...

Right yes. (Derek)

... can I assure you that the tape is for my benefit and, therefore, is confidential and I assure you that the research is independent - it's for me. O.K. so you've moved to points tariff but it doesn't really feel like that's been very different.

Hmm , we are now piloting..., just to carry on from that..., we are piloting this new..., new EXCEL form that doesn't actually categorise. Like we used to Year 11 interviews etc. (Ann)

Right, mmmm.

Year 10 interviews... it's just interviews, group work and work with the unemployed... (Ann)

Right.

..that they're particularly looking at. (Ann)

Yes.

It seems more of a, sort of time, study than that of target study. (Ann)

Oh that's interesting.

Because we have to put..., we have to put what time we finish and start and what time and how long we spend at lunch and how long at tea breaks...(Ann)

Hmm.

We've been concentrating on that a little bit more in this new form. (Ann)

Yes, so you're looking more about how the time is used?

Mmmmmm. (Ann)

...and where the priorities are lying.

Yeah. (Ann)

...in terms of allocation , O.K.

But we've not done it yet, we've only just started it now. (Ann)

Derek, have you found that the points tariff, rather than targets, has made any difference?

Mmmmm, I don't know any differencet really. (Derek)

No, no.

Because I've always worked under targets. (Derek)

Right.

So...(Derek)

No that's O.K., one of the things from the questionnaire that I administered last year., the analysis came up with how guidance professionals dealt with the targets. Mmmm, there were three kind of themes that emerged, one was that that they worked through their lunch break or at home, so they actually put more time into their work, another one was being very organised and having the school on board, particularly those that have worked in the education team. And the third thing was that people dealt with the targets by seeing them not as their problem, but as a management problem. Do you recognise those as being mechanisms? Do you have any other ways?

I think certainly doing work at home and working through lunch times is increasing and certainly is becoming the norm for lots of staff now. (Barbara)

Right.

...and it's very hard to resist that at times. (Barbara)

For Barbara and I..., We are Team Leaders as well. (Carol)

Yes.

So, part of our responsibility is to monitor other people's achievement. I mean, I think we are quite aware of the targets, because we keep track of them all the time. (Carol)

Yes.

...so I wouldn't really say we can just sit back and say these are somebody else's problem because they're our problems. (Carol)

'Cos you're the very people that, sort of, have to deal with it, but one of the ways you're dealing with it is by working more hours.

I try not to. (Carol)

I try not to but I work part time and I'm falling into the trap of working on my day off - that sort of thing. (Barbara)

Yes.

I think definitely working through lunch hours. (Carol)

Yes, at school it's a... the norm, you see. (Barbara)

I try not to work at home, to be honest, but I would say definitely...through lunch

hours. (Carol)

Yeah.

I think it's the spare capacity in your diary, the things like meetings and that has gone., so you're using your lunch times too, I mean I'm certainly doing that, whereas I had arranged a meeting after school or on a day I wasn't in school, now I haven't got that time any more, so I'm arranging meetings in my lunch time. (Barbara)

Hmm. (General agreement, more than one voice, unattributable.)

Have you felt that?

I personally think that they are achievable., the targets. I think that the third category you said... it is a management problem really. I don't sort of worry about them, so I just find that when I add them up... that they're there or thereabouts. (Derek)

Yes.

Having said that about...lunch hours, well we don't get a lunch hour in school . I'm lucky if I get ten minutes to snatch a sandwich or perhaps have a meal. As far as working from home, I don't... Alright, I might take ten minutes.. I might prepare what to take to tomorrow, I try to refuse to work from home ...you know. (Derek)

One of the things about this being very organised...there are two things..., firstly people were very clear that they depended on the school, you know, that if the school was not aligned sort of with them ... then it wasn't going to happen...the achievement... particularly... I think with group work.

I think that's an issue. Derek works in two quite good schools..., it is more difficult for people that are working in schools. (Carol)

And they are battling against...

And I think., I mean, one of the ways we try and deal with it here is not to give people personal targets, but to look at the targets per school. (Carol)

Yes.

So that when we're doing the monitoring, we're actually monitoring what's been achieved in each school within the last three months - achieved by an individual, because you know, if you're working in a very difficult school, your achievements are going to be less. (Carol)

Exactly, and that's not necessarily a reflection of the work that's been attempted to be done.

No, no that's right. (Barbara)

I wonder if you felt there had been positive effects like that of the targets?

Errrrr (Ann, Barbara, Carol)

I know it's a complicated question.

In our office..., I mean, last month was a good example. I mean, you probably have the same pressure as well because we was told as a company we have..., well we have sort of, fallen below our Year 11 targets...(Ann)

Right.

...and we had to make the deficit up in the December before Christmas and we did and, sort of, over achieved as well so we did really, really well. And I think I would agree with the first couple of statements there that it did seem to make people, sort of, gel together a bit more..., I mean, everybody was sort of really pleased. (Ann)

And sort of..., everyone pulling in the same direction.

Yes, yes so it didn't have the detrimental effect of everybody saying for goodness sake, you know, we're working as hard as we can and people did, sort of, rise and over achieve, so it had that effect really. (Ann)

Yes that's interesting having gone from under to over in the space of a few weeks.

Yes, I mean, some of it was good for good reasons, like...for instance in my school ...my school was out on work experience in November so... and then I'd have planned for that, but then the week before they went on work experience, I was told you can't interview this week because they're going to be away for three weeks so, you know we don't want them to miss four weeks of lessons so consequently, I lost a whole week's interviews there..., so yes that's why it happened. (Ann)

We really didn't have that pressure here (in a different office within the same careers company), no we didn't Barbara, because we were on target I think, but I mean my feelings about the targets, I mean, going back to the early days of no targets at all, I think it has had a beneficial effect. I think it has made us more accountable, you know, has focused people into working with schools to, sort of, achieve certain things. I think that there is... and has been... and hopefully it looks like this might be changing a bit... too much - it's been too rigid and that were, sort of, forcing things on schools and the youngsters that they don't necessarily want so, I think it's had a detrimental effect in that way and I think it would be much better if we could be more flexible in, sort of, negotiating work with school. I think there has been a concentration on quantity rather than quality. (Carol)

Has that been, do you think that's at the expense of quality?

In some cases, I think it has. (Carol)

Mmmm, mmm (number of voices of agreement, unattributable)

I mean I think it has improved the quality in certain aspects, like the Action Plan, I think it has greatly improved the process of how we come across as professionals. I mean, I do have doubts about the Action Plan personally but, I think the image we create by the action planning process is of benefit to us particularly. (Elaine)

The targets, I think... we've always had targets really, I mean, going back to when I first started in the careers service, they weren't called targets but blanket interviewing, you know, you had to interview everybody, you still had this figure that you had to work towards to get through them, but we didn't call them targets, and there was no pressure - they weren't tied to money or income or anything like that then. (Barbara)

It's the target with all the other things added to them I think. I think some of the pressures, you know, stem from the group work and things like that, because people don't feel that they've got the time to prepare it, so you tend to pull things off the shelf, whereas you might spend a bit more time improving the quality of what you're doing. (Carol)

Yes.

I think that tends to be reflected in what the youngsters think of the groups as well. (Carol)

Yes but what you're delivering is, sort of, good enough but rather than what you would actually like to deliver... (cueing in from a non verbal) Derek if you?

Targets on group work, it doesn't always tell the full story. I would think you know what message that were trying to get across and what is the best way to do it so really the figures..., you don't have to tell the whole story..., there's a reason for everything. I'm not against the accountability, but whether that's the way to do it I don't know...(Derek)

Yeah that's why a bit more flexibility in what you negotiate with schools is gonna be helpful because you can then you can look at what the needs of the school are. (Carol)

In a sense you actually have to go back to what the targets are... almost and, you know..., make sure and that what you're negotiating is the right thing.

Yeah. (Barbara, Carol)

I'd be interested to know what you would say to that, you know, the idea of sanctions if you don't meet it or rewards if you do?

I can't see what sanction they could impose...fire you? (Derek)

Well, one example was they got less income if they didn't meet their sales targets...,

What personally or individually? (Carol)

Personally..., exactly, if they did meet them, they got a bonus.

Is this a careers service you say? (Derek)

No, in his previous job. If he met them, he got more money, if he didn't meet them he got his money docked and he was surprised that that didn't happen in the careers service. He felt that that meant that the targets weren't real.

Yeah I can identify with that because I was in recruitment for most of my career, and it is targets and, you know, performance related pay really. (Derek)

Yes, I don't actually believe in that. (Carol)

I'm not saying I agree with it but that's what it definitely is in private recruitment and were in a similar role aren't we? (Derek)

So you've had experience of it...but not sure it's a good thing ?

Mmmm, it's not such a good thing for the Careers Service, no. (Derek)

Right, O.K., but why is that? Why would it not be a good thing for the careers service?

Er, because, as I say, it doesn't tell the true story, you know, you can have a school where it's really, really difficult to, you know, to get in your times or whatever group work...so, you know, so it's no reflection necessarily on the Careers Guidance Adviser...there's more to it. (Derek)

Thanks. (Cueing in from a non verbal) Barbara, what about you?

Yeah I was going to say just thinking back, I mean, over all our sort of working life we can all probably identify with people who haven't seemed to pull their weight - the same weight as everyone else, and I think at times when you're under pressure, that kind of situation tends to come out more doesn't it and people feel resentful if they don't see anything being done about it but, you know that's obviously for an area of management to pick that up in appraisals and whatever - I think the pressure sort of adds to that and helps to fuel it. (Barbara)

Yes, yes it's really locked into the context of everybody being under pressure and, therefore, feeling that more acutely.

Yes, yes. (Barbara, Carol)

Something that normally... that they just run along with...they, sort of, feel it more because of the pressure.

That's right. (Barbara)

Do you have anything to say on that?

Yes, I mean, I just don't really agree with financial sanctions, because I don't think we operate on the levels of markets and we're operating in areas that are out of our control it's, you know, not like a sales situation, so I don't think you can apply the same logic in a way. I mean, I agree with Barbara about, you know, there are some people that you can identify and I think there are other sanctions that can be applied, but not financial ones. I don't agree with that because you know the criteria that you're looking at might not be level. (Carol)

What kind of sanctions could you think of?

Well you can introduce sort of disciplinary sort of procedures. (Carol)

Yeah.

...and sort of more monitoring... (Carol)

But that would be if you felt that the work was sort of negligent or wilfully deliberate - wrong?

Mmmmmmm but I mean, to be honest, in this industry, most people are doing it because they want to actually achieve the best for the young people, so I think if they're not achieving their targets, there were normally reasons for it. (Carol)

Yes.

And you know I think on the whole, most people working in their Careers Service they're working with the interests of the young people at heart, and I think that sometimes they're not as... people are not aware of targets as others you know some people are not motivated by targets as others, you know, but I think at the end of the day everybody working in the Careers Service is motivated by the will to help the young people and I think, you know, it's up to the people who are managing... to kind of harness that into producing the targets. (Carol)

I think that the way the careers service is funded doesn't allow for that because, if we over achieve we don't get any extra for it , so really the Careers Service is not really geared for that situation any how..., alright they might not get it if we under achieve but certainly if we over achieve they don't get any extra so... (Ann)

..and the targets don't tell the whole story do they? (Carol)

No. (Ann)

I mean you could have somebody who achieved, you know, a lot more than somebody else but, the other person might be involved in working parties and other kinds of input that they're not actually achieving numerical targets but yet are still achieving ...you know, a contribution. (Carol)

Yes absolutely yes. (Ann, Barbara) (General Agreement).

The phrase that re-occurs here; "they don't tell the whole story". Could you think of other measures that would allow you to tell the whole story of the work that you do?

Not on the education team I couldn't, maybe on the labour market - you bring in things like the employer contacts. (Derek)

Right, right.

But with us I can't see it. (Derek)

Well maybe something that Ann's doing at the moment ...where they're measuring what they spend their time on, you know, what people spend time on. (Carol)

It doesn't tell you what you produced from it does it? (Barbara)

No, no unfortunately..., I mean, you don't tell what you are doing if you've got ... saying you've worked from 8.30 till 5.00, if you've not done any interviews or group work, you maybe preparing all day group work for sessions that you're maybe running in school but, there's nothing on the form to say that what you've been doing so, it looks like you've spent a whole day doing nothing. (Ann)

(LAUGHTER)

Mmmmmm, yeah. (Carol, Barbara)

...because all they want to count is the interviews, the group work and things like that so., it doesn't tell the whole story but, then again, as George (referring to manager not present in focus group) said the other day if you spend that whole day preparing group work and then the following day or the day after you show that you've done ten groups, the story speaks for itself and you can see that you've had to spend that time to do ten group works. (Ann)

Looking at client satisfaction, long term tracking of clients, feedback from parents or colleagues and action research to show what is done. Would you see those as being useful as indicators of what you do or, or not?

Two of them... I would certainly from parents and in the schools as well. (Derek)

Right.

I think there's some value in the tracking, because I think part of the frustration of the work that we do at the moment, you know, is that we're not seeing the youngsters often, finish the hour of the interview and that's it... we never find out what happens to them, we don't know if the advice we've given them has been ..., you know, followed through or anything like that...what obstacles they've met along the way and how they've dealt with it, we don't find that out. (Barbara)

Apart from the destination?

Apart from the destination, yes. (Barbara)

But that's a very short gap actually?

Mmmm yes, that's right. (Barbara, Elaine)

Between leaving compulsory education and the destination...

And still you don't know what's gone on in between do you in that three or four months, or whenever, since we've seen them? (Barbara)

About five years down the road, if you asked a client, you know, at say sixteen or say when they're twenty-one or even older, how they feel about the careers advice they got when they were at school or at college that might be an indicator. (Derek)

We think it's difficult because the careers advice that young people get is a very small amount of time when you compare the influences of other people like parents and ... and, you know, it's not always easy five years on for youngsters to actually remember that kind of thing... what their careers advice was. (Carol)

Yes.

Mmmm no matter how good it was, they still may be influenced by other passions and go down a completely different road , I mean a good example was somebody that I've seen in college today who was very good at art at school but didn't do particularly well in her other GCSE's but actually went on to Business Studies GNVQ from parental pressure and is now on an Advanced Art course and went from intermediate Business Studies to Art ... but you know, the first choice..., that wasn't right for her..., it wasn't anything to do with the guidance she received, it must have been the pressures from home so, you know, I think there's difficulties even in doing that. (Carol)

But the long term tracking there...you would be able to go back to the initial Action Plan and show that Art had been discussed.

But it wasn't , it wasn't even included at all because she was just saying what her parents wanted her to do - not what she wanted. (Carol)

Yes, yes.

Because at that time she was still young enough to not be able to be independent and say "This is what I want to do". (Carol)

Absolutely yes, I think that's also the danger with client satisfaction sometimes you give guidance that clients don't want to hear, that doesn't mean it's bad guidance if it's unacceptable at that point so...

I think, I mean, we have to look for a combination really. (Elaine)

That's right, yes.

I think that the government , looked at it ...to try and measure by the number of college drop outs. I did read an article once and it, sort of you know..., if the number of drop outs goes down, that could mean that the guidance is of a good standard., that was one way they were going to measure it. (Derek)

Of course it could have also meant that unemployment was the worst option at college.

Yeah exactly. (Derek, Elaine)

I mean that's the trouble with being with kind of... with the research and the long term tracking but, maybe, that could be one way of looking at it. O.K?

It's certainly the impression that were getting...that the pilot office for these new forms as well as the encouragement, is to work more with those students that are more likely to drop out of school or college or simply disappear and we never see again. We're actively being encouraged to have a lot more contact with these students and to spend more time with them than perhaps we may be doing in schools with students that know where they're going and know what they want to do. No, no more that's how we're getting hold of these, because I've been given a list of four students today at school that I work in that I am now going to phone at home because they've been bad attenders at school so, rather than like last year, I might not have bothered and thought "Oh well they've left school it doesn't really matter", you know this year - we're told we must follow these up now and see what's happening to them. (Elaine)

So that change of policy has really sort of helped you prioritise what ...what you would do.

Yeah we're now having a drop-in centre for disaffected clients who have had bad attendance at school and we go to the youth bus in our local, sort of, school that sort of, travels around now. (Elaine)

Yes, yes very much especially the youth bus that's been really popular and also we've now got a Careers Advisor that's going to (location given) ladies' prison... (Elaine)

Oh right.

...and doing useful work down there. (Elaine)

We used to do that years ago didn't we? (Carol)

Yes. (Elaine)

It's been encouraged again, whereas it was allowed to be dropped 'cos it didn't seem that important, now all of a sudden, it is again, so the encouragement is definitely being that we must help these students who might drop out...so. There's an element of truth to what you said about the ones that are likely to drop out of college...that these are the ones we have to pick up on. (Ann)

There's a number of initiatives to do with offenders aren't there across the county - aren't there? It's not just in your area?

No, no it's definitely a nation-wide thing now. (Ann)

A growing area.

So, could I ask you just to... kind of think on your own for a minute about one or two scenarios and then I'll ask you to share your ideas about how you would tackle these scenarios with the group.

Can I ask you...there isn't a right or wrong answer, I'm just interested to know how you would tackle it, how you would go about sorting out the problem. (Vignette; lunchtime drop-in session) Just think about that for a minute and then could I ask you to tell everyone else what you would do?

Go on tell us what you would do?

Well I'd talk to them for a while and then make an appointment to see them where I could devote more time to them without, you know, eight of the students standing there distracting me, you know, worrying that they want to be seen and that they have their needs as well. As far as I'm aware, you know, all the other eight may have problems that may need longer, so I need to speak to them as well. (Barbara)

Yeah I think I'd do exactly the same, I mean, the school that I'm in ...I arrange my own interviews, so it would be easy for me to get them in the following time I was in there, so I would just do that. (Carol)

O.K.

Yeah, similar. I would ask them to see Mr or Miss whoever the Careers Co-ordinator is and make an appointment. Usually I've got appointments over the week but, we'd slot them in as priority on the next one. (Derek)

Yes make it clear to them that you're not just dismissing them. I think I'd, sort of, emphasise that I'm not just dismissing you but this is obviously going to take quite a long while to sort out and there are other students I need to consider so I'd like to weigh out the importance of what you need and we'd slot you in as soon as possible. (Elaine)

O.K. that seems a very easy one to tackle.

(LAUGHTER)

Mmmmm, I'll ask you two more. (Vignette) You share a school with a colleague who's now on extended sick leave..

Oh yeah. (Outburst of heartfelt laughter from all participants)

School is very insistent. How would you manage that?

You obviously don't need time to think.

(LAUGHTER)

It's obvious, 'cos it happens here all the time! (Barbara, Carol, Derek)

This means that my scenarios are spot on. Tell me what you'd do with that?

Well, first of all I would report it to my Manager straight away and try and see if she can arrange anything and e-mail all the rest to see if they can gain help, a Mayday call. (Ann)

If anyone looks at their e-mails. No-one looks at emails. (Unattributable)

(LAUGHTER)

I mean, if there are Careers Advisors that don't look at their e-mail, we always have a meeting on a Monday afternoon so, if nobody replied to your e-mail or you've got very little response, we sort of shout out "Help" then, 'cos everybody's there and they're facing you, I mean if you can't get any help, I would ask Jennifer (manager in that office) to come in with me to re-negotiate. (Ann)

Right, right, O.K.

I'd obviously have a chat with the Careers Co-ordinator or the Head and say that probably... that it's unlikely we could bring in extra staff 'cos we're all working to capacity usually and we'd have to sit down together and prioritise right, you know, what could we do...what's really important yeah and hopefully we'd deal with it that way. (Derek)

Can I ask you two to talk about this in your Team Leader capacity?

Mmmmmm... well, we've dealt with this situation on many occasions and the traditional method, it's best to stand out there and shout "Help!" (Barbara)

Is anybody free on such and such a day? (Carol)

(LAUGHTER)

..but what we do is any dates we're having problems with we bring to our monthly team meetings and try and book them up in advance with the situations we're aware of, but when they occur... when we're not sort of expecting them, we would just try to approach as many people as possible I think ..if we all chip in and help. (Barbara)

We could also get help from the Labour Market team as well and when we've done that some of the ETAs have been in and helped with the groupwork and usually our Manager...(Carol)

(LAUGHTER)

... but she was actually going to go in and, sort of, do the groupwork even though she hasn't done any for three years... with great trepidation. (Carol)

Our manager does that as well; she's really good. (Ann)

Yeah..., I mean, normally it does resolve itself, we normally find ...(Barbara)

Yes it does. (Carol)

I don't think we've ever found ourselves in this situation where we haven't managed to sort it out, to deliver it - we've managed it some how haven't we? (Barbara)

Mmmmmmm, yes. (General agreement, unattributable)

I mean we've had a real problem this year due to UEL...(Carol)

(LAUGHTER)

'..cos, (Carol)

That's OK, I'm here from Warwick University today. Please tell me about the problems you've had with UEL?

We've got a fair number of our schools that seem to have their PSE [personal and social education] programmes on a Wednesday...with our trainees, because we have got a high number of trainees in this office...(Carol)

You have.

So we've had a problem with the groupwork all falling on a Wednesday... so this has been a familiar problem. (Carol)

(LAUGHTER)

O.K. thank you. And one last scenario. (Vignette; delegating group work to student careers adviser). Could this student help you to meet group work targets in school?

Yes. (Barbara, Carol)

They wouldn't have a choice. (Carol)

I mean, everybody does group work whether they're trainees or probationers...they all do it. (Barbara)

Yes, yes. (Derek)

I'm not talking about someone who's part of your company, who's going to your area once a week, I'm talking about someone on a full-time course who's on a placement in school...

We've taken people in with us. (Carol)

One thing I would like to ask... if you had two minutes to talk to (the Government Office for the region) what message would you want to get across to them? What would you feel would be important that they understand about your work?

Mmmmmm they should have a look again at our criteria for Action Plan then the pedantic way that you put down, you know, you're in Year eleven and the criteria..., I think there should be guide lines that, you know, we're taking them to the letter aren't we otherwise maybe the company doesn't get paid, I mean I accept that but, you know, personally I think it should be the client should own it, it should be done in your style and theirs together really, as long as the message gets across you know it should be an overall summary and if you do your job properly, the points that they're asking probably will be in there - but to write down, you know, "John you are in Year 11 at (name given) school", it's ridiculous. (Derek)

Right, that's a fair comment.

And the fact that partly they sort of have to be fairly directive in a certain way because we're told you've got to have one clear goal, and they might not have a clear goal, and then you either don't claim your Action Plan and don't get your money or else you have to make them say "Well, this would be my first choice if I had to make a choice and they sometimes don't want to make that choice. To have it open...so that we can say to them; "These are your options, it's up to you what you want to do out of these options and this is what you asked of me today and I've told you what they are and it's up to you to choose what you want". I'd like to see it more like that, more open. (Ann)

Yes, so again it's it's less rigid less... prescriptive.

Reflecting that we are impartial advisors. I mean I don't think an Action Plan reflects that...that we are impartial. (Elaine)

I mean I would like to see more flexibility with the negotiations with schools, you know, so that you don't have to do three group works in Year 11 - you can actually meet their needs at school and fit into their careers education programme, 'cos it's very different in... different schools, so I mean, I'd like to see the return to more the idea of the menu approach., than in a school where you go in and negotiate and then, you know, what suits us and does obviously, you know, meet some targets but also reflects the needs of the school, rather than actually imposing on the school on what you've got to do. (Carol)

So the school rather than the pupils, the needs of the schools, rather than the needs for the pupils?

Well I think, I mean your negotiations have got to be with the schools - you don't actually get a chance to negotiate with individual people. (Carol)

I mean I agree I think you've got to negotiate with the school what is the best way between us we can get across careers education if it means only two...in Year 9. (Derek)

I mean I think we still want to have some basic entitlement to youngsters to access to your services but I think it just needs to be more flexible than it has been , which we do seem to be going back to a little bit. (Carol)

Yes, yes. (Derek)

It does seem to be moving more towards that, and I think that's important because I thinks it's been very rigid... it seems to be moving a bit more towards that... and you can negotiate to perhaps work with more groups more than others which, you haven't had that option in the past, everybody has had to these two group works in Year nine and Year ten where you know.. (Carol)

I mean sizes as well. (Derek)

There maybe some groups that could be more important than other groups that probably don't need so much, so I think we need that flexibility. (Carol)

I think Id like to... for them to accept our sort of professional judgement and our professional experience and leave it in our hands, rather than you know, being told what we have to do and also for the message to come across strongly that these are, you know, real people we're dealing with and, you know, you can't account for people in what they do and no matter how much you try and guide them or give them this or they're entitled to that you know you just can't account for people can you? (Barbara)

Mmmm, no you can't. (Ann, Elaine)

I think what they need to do is come and spend some time here not talking to managers but coming out with us, and not just for an hour, but for a week, for a month and carrying the bags - everything, experiencing all the problems that we have. (Barbara)

Can I just pick up on one thing? If you have a framework that says we expect you to do work and show us what work you've done, but we leave it up to you to decide what the needs are..., so the power to decide what's appropriate but the responsibility to then show that you've done it, could you live with that?

Mmm, (agreement)...Probably. (Carol, David, Elaine)

Well that was a great ending to the tape!

(LAUGHTER)

Is there anything I haven't given you a chance to say that you would like to say?

I mean I think one of the big contributors towards stress amongst practitioners has not actually been so much the targets but the I.T and the fact that it doesn't really work very well, ... and I think people could cope with the targets...if the equipment was more efficient, I mean that's definitely been the problem in this office. (Carol)

Mmm, mmm. (Derek)

And the way things have changed without really consulting people who actually work in the field, I mean, these pilot things we're having to go for...we have to do them and we have to tell them the problems, well we haven't got the time to keep on doing this and we keep having to getting used to these new forms and it just drives you mad. If only they would have come and talked to us as to what they want in it in the first place, we would be able to sort of probably devise something between us that would be workable. , We keep getting this thrown at us, you know, they think it's a good idea and then we use it and think "Oh no!" (Ann)

(LAUGHTER)

It just don't ...work. (Barbara)

We need...seriously to the I.T 'cos if it doesn't work, and it doesn't does it?, there's a lot of colleagues that are really unlucky with their laptops - well we've all had problems... and with the system and you really haven't got the tools to do the job have you? (Elaine)

Mmmm yes, and the up-grading that has to be done in the middle of term instead of waiting for holidays when you're actually gonna not be able to use it in three days because you've got to bring it in one day and it's gonna be up-graded the next day and you can't pick it up until the end of the following day so...(Ann)

This causes real stress. (Carol)

It's all you need at the end of the day. (Elaine)

You know it's gonna end in tears at the end of the day. (Carol)

Being let down by the I.T team. (unattributable)

For instance you could have had a heavy day you can now say you can try and up-load or down-load a disk and be there about half an hour. (Derek)

This is from your laptop to the system?

Yeah, that's right it does happen you know, I been here three quarters of an hour just doing two disks you know and at the end of the day it's the straw that breaks the camel's back for some people. (Derek)

Only one person can do it at a times, unless you're unlucky enough to come in and, you know, two or three people are already waiting... you have to queue don't you? You know, people have been here till seven o'clock, half past seven time to just upload their laptop and that in itself causes a lot of stress. (Carol)

Mmmm. (Derek)

Can I just thank you again very much for your time and your willingness...I'd like to say I'm going to write it all up and it's going to change your lives forever...

(LAUGHTER)

...but it would be very foolish of me to do that.

We're not that gullible. (Ann)

I mean it's an underpaid career as well, it really is. (Derek)

Yeah, I'd go along with that. (Carol)

Mmmmmm. So really it's just to thank you very much and just to assure you that the tape is confidential.

Appendix 10

Focus Group 2; Edited Transcript
Conducted March 11th 1999

Rachel Mulvey - plain text.
Individual contributors - italic.

Please note that contributors are identified in this transcript, but by pseudonym, to preserve confidentiality. Where people in the group refer to each other by name, this has been changed to the pseudonym.

...started a year ago, since then the targets for Action Plans and group work and so on.., the actual targets have been dropped and a points tariff has been introduced. How has that been? How have you found that change?

We've still very much got our targets very much in interviews, Action Plans, groups and we haven't had any flexibility really - to work within that - that's been described by the [...]so the flexibility and the thought was there,but it didn't materialise. (Fiona)

That's exactly what I was about to say, at ground level we've still got the same targets. (George)

The flexibility has been the way Head Office has been able to manipulate what figures have come in and in the end they need rather than...(Harriet)

Right. Did you expect it to be more flexible?

No. ...(unattributed)

Yes, I did. (Fiona)

You did? You thought the points would make

Well, when it was first introduced to us..., like if you go back, it's like everything, when it's first introduced, I think it's always first introduced as a real opportunity and we were told....., I can remember when Liz came to a meeting at the study centre and actually talked about flexibility to negotiate. (Fiona)

Did you all expect it to be different?

No...(unattributed)

I'm not sure... I don't remember feeling surprised when it wasn't though...so (Scott)

(LAUGHTER)

So there was possibly, kind of the hope that it might be different, but you weren't surprised when those hopes were somewhat dashed?

To be honest, life has gone on at the same sort of pace and I haven't even thought about the change in the way of working - it's just been head-down and go for it. (Jackie)

If we had been given a more flexible approach we would have done. And say, we can be flexible - how will we be flexible? But because we weren't given the flexibility, yes it's been head down and do what. (Fiona)

But thinking about whether I was surprised about whether it materialised or not, I hadn't even thought about it. (Jackie)

I don't think I was surprised I hope I just thought I've got x amount of students to see - partly because I thought I ought to see them anyway - so I just got on with that. I didn't really think of the targets in that way....I always felt like I need to get through them. (Terry)

Sure. You know, I wondered if you'd found on the group work side, the points tariff had made any difference?

No...No...(several voices, general agreement)

There is simply the flexibility...because of it being Year 9 and 10 where a lot of group work is done, which is actually geared up to Year 9 or Year 10, rather than so many in each. (Jackie)

Yeah. [Rachel turns to Harriet who had just spoken quietly] Sorry, I didn't quite catch what you just said there?

Oh I said we were still being equally creative. (Harriet)

(LAUGHTER)

I would say the only bit of flexibility we have had..... sorry to be a positive one, the only flexibility that we have had is that we can now add the groups together over Year 9 and 10and come out with a sum. (Fiona)

Oh right,

So, where we had Year 9, Year 10 and then Year 11 now, we've got Year 9, Year 10 and then Year 11's, so there is a little more flexibility. (Fiona)

But still pretty constrained? [Rachel pauses while Fiona thinks about it, then shakes her head] No, sorry it isn't pretty constrained.

I think it is, but I just wanted to say that that there's that little bit between Years 9 and 10. (Fiona)

Right, OK, so life pretty much the usual.

Yeah. (Fiona)

I'd be interested to know how do you manage to meet your targets?

(LAUGHTER; general, heartfelt)

By working, very, very, very hard .. and planning it carefully. (Jackie)

By working through lunch or at home, yeah?

Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah, Yeah (several voices, general agreement)

The last focus group, not to lead you, but the last focus group said that was just normal now.

It is, yeah. Yes, it is. (several voices, general agreement)

And would you say .. was it always like that?

No, not as bad. (male voice, unattributed)

But putting a perspective on this working from home now Rachel, I've come across a lot of people, probationers, or a lot of people just out of their probationary year, that are so hung up about getting the Action Plan absolutely perfect, that no matter that they've got ample time they'd still prefer and choose to do it at home, so I do actually think there's a lot of self-made pressure of people doing Action Plans at home. I know some people only get 40 mins. but when they have an hour plus, and then they still choose to do it at home, I actually think that you should take that out of the equation. (Harriet)

Absolutely. Is that a function of being newly qualified or do you think that's kind of a personality thing?

I think it's a personality thing yes it is, to be honest. (Harriet)

And also, they might have more space and time at home to do it, whereas other people may have other calls on their time when they get home.

I think also it maybe to do with the personality of certain team leaders or area managers who are perhaps being a little more 'picky' about the way they are monitoring Action Plans, so I think it's a combination of factors there. (Harriet)

Can we spell out here, it was an issue that we talked about in the UNISON stewards and every steward said there were people in their office, and probably most people, who were doing lunch times, staying after work - late and even coming in at weekends and taking work home. And that was unanimous - without exception - everybody said that. (Scott)

Was that to do Action Plans?

That was to do all kinds.... a lot of it was Action Plans, you know, and things like this but your original question was 'What do you do to meet your targets?' wasn't it? And if you say....., it's how you manage your case load and personally mine has been four and a half days in school [per week] and that has meant, if necessary, coming in at odd times to load up or not if the system doesn't work, and that's been weekends and that...I think there's some of that sort of stuff and there's some people who have been booked in for different times in school and have not been able to do the Action Plans and have had to do it themselves, you know, and things like that. (Scott)

I think that's right, there have been lots of occasions where that has happened, but there are certain people within the company who will always take all their actions plans home every night, and do them every night regardless. I think that's a different issue than pressure. (Harriet)

That also comes down to the kinds of skills you need to be able to do them quickly and being willing to develop those skills as well. (Jackie)

Can you be specific about the skills?

Well you've got to be prepared to make a 'plonker' of yourself in front of the client, and once you get over that hurdle [of actually using laptops in the careers interview], because it is actually quite difficult at first, but you get accustomed and maybe some people never get over that barrier and dividing your attention between a client and a computer and what have you. But also it's just typing fast and updating the records accurately and, fast but it's something that you needed to develop, it didn't sort of come automatically, even if you could type fast. There are all sorts of other things that you had to practise to get to that stage of being able to do it. (Jackie)

I also think that it people who don't like doing things the first time, the more you put it off, the bigger the hurdle it becomes. (Harriet)

But eventually it's so over-burdeningly time-consuming to have to do them afterwards but you couldn't cope with it. (Jackie)

Do you think it makes any difference to the quality of the guidance interview if the Action Plan is done there and then or if it's done later?

I prefer it that way because you can actually because you can end the interview with something - this is the recommended course of action - take it away with you. (Terry)

Yeah.

It closes the interview quite nicely. (Terry)

It makes a very good closing down summary actually - you put your heads together to come up with the things that are going to be included as well. (Jackie)

Except that if you've got somebody who takes an awful lot of time or who isn't good at including the client, it can actually destroy a lot of the good work that's gone on in the interview before. I've sat there and seen the youngsters, sort of being, shut down, from the process because it's taking so long. I mean, I think it's good practice go give them something but, if it's going to be very slow, then it's probably better to do a manual one quickly and then say to them...(Harriet)

And collaboratively..

Yes, do it collaboratively and quickly, even if it's only bullet points. (Harriet)

Yes. So, really what you're saying is that the Action Plan, for you, is integral to the interview?

It's integral to the interview but the method of which you actually close the interview and handle that Action Plan, is crucial because it can actually destroy a lot of the rapport and all the other ..things that have gone on. (Harriet)

That's a skill which you would have to be comfortable with as part of your training, like any other part of the interviews and I think that's something that you should be comfortable in delivering. My feeling is that I think they should have an Action Plan, even if the updating had to be done at a later stage. The technical bits....., you know, I would feel very unhappy about people going away without an Action Plan and somebody writing it about them afterwards. (Fiona)

Can I just say on that point about shutting the client out, that's what has not helped with this process has been the constant tightening up of the requirements of the Action Plan to the stage where people feel that they have to do a two-page Action Plan - typing up two pages - and it has also to fit in boxes and that has been the development over the past year or so. I think that's exacerbated this problem. (Scott)

Where do you see that tightening up coming from?

Head Office. Head...Head Office rather than...(general agreement)

Yeah, Head Office. (Scott)

Because it's actually loosened up slightly - and I think Head Office has realised and slightly relaxed it a little bit soI think it did come from Head Office. (Harriet)

Can I say, I don't know if it's true for everyone, but I'm still very vague on this loosening up and I would still say that I'm erring on the side of caution - and that means two-page Action Plans for the vast majority of cases. (Scott)

Following the claimable Action Plan checklist...[Jackie interrupts question]

You see apparently it's gone now, these criteria, these 28 points or so, but nobody's told us that officially. (Jackie)

But it's not so long ago since, I mean, I've had an Action Plan when I've said this is fine Fiona but then there's this and that still all keeps us all on our toes. (Scott)

But they probably haven't told Fiona that. (Jackie)

So, you think that's a good thing then, that you're all kept on your toes, that somebody scrutinises....?

We've got all these factors together, we've got one factor of 'does this close the client off?' We all accept that there's value of doing it but the length of time is the key factor there. There's the other about the skills of the individual, one of the skills - of being able to incorporate that but other basic ones like typing speed is a factor for us non-typists. And if the pressure is to make longer Action Plans, longer than, I think, you actually need. (Scott)

As a monitor of Action Plans, I actually think that in many cases our Action Plans are tons better than they were two years ago. (Fiona)

I agree with that. (Jackie)

I mean, if you look back at the kind of things written by all members of staff, I think we do something that.... I mean, in certain cases, because we want to get a claimable Action Plan out of it for that person the Action Plan might not be 99% good, but I would say that as a general comment our Action Plans are much better. (Fiona)

There's a benchmark?

There is and I think also, the fact that we now take into account that a parent might read this, and I think if you just put a little more detail. In an interview..., the kid might well understand it - there's no need to put many details but someone else actually picking it up might have a hard job actually wondering. (Fiona)

Can I just say what you're saying is that the Action Plan, from your point of view, might be better but not necessarily the interview. (Scott)

Yeah...but (Harriet, Jackie)

The interview might suffer because of that detail. (Scott)

But now it's a marketing document for our services, now, isn't it? It's taking on that hue, because it goes to other people, a reflection of what we do. (Harriet)

With a mind to parents, I think that's always in the back of my mind. (Scott)

But I also think that the idea of it being included in something that the kids going to take with them, like their Record of Achievement, it gets turned into the future it's got to be a certain high standard and can be the sort of things that make [] (Jackie)

Can I just ask you to clarify something? When you talk about being monitored for the Action Plans, is that a management monitoring or peer monitoring?

I'm the team leader for the education team, it's sort of peer I would say, rather than management but I am given the responsibility. (Fiona)

And it's your peers that you would.....[Terry interrupts]

It's more in the spirit of peer even though you're like a management. (Terry)

I hope so (LAUGHTER) - I'll leave the room. Yeah, I would say in the spirit of peer assessment but it is part of my job and I have to do it...monthly, and I have to fill in a form for everybody...it's helpful for me to. (Harriet)

That's OK.

Picking up what you said: that people do work longer and that's for complex reasons and we can't just assume that there's just one reason for working beyond contracted hours in a sense; and we talked a little about standardisation and embedding good practice, that everybody's working to good practice standards; and we talked a little bit about Action Plans being separate from the interview but integral to the process.

Do you see meeting targets as a management problem or a practitioner problem?

It depends if you're given individual targets or not. (Harriet)

Yes, yes.

I think up 'til last year - not all offices in [Company X] had individual targets, it's now become policy that everybody has individual targets and that really means that there's individual accountability now. (Harriet)

I think the problem then can be that you look at the target rather than do the job. You know, we had a discussion earlier on about group work - a road show in a school, will it run, won't it run, are we needed, are the stalls sort of set up. We don't need targets now .. The implications of the targets is "Don't do it" which is..., I think it's back to front. (Terry)

I would actually challenge that slightly because I think it was not a case of we wouldn't do it, but a case that we may have done it in June, when the school actually preferred it. (Fiona)

No, not from the later part of the conversation.....no. (Terry)

No, no, we would do something in June not do it like we would do group work related to options, but we would do something because it's easier for us to do it then. (Scott)

But it goes on more than that, this was something that was planned for sometime and they said they wanted it and then they said it was logistically problematic for

them so it wasn't just that we were insisting we were doing something or not. (Jackie)

We had an option of doing something when it suited the school - but that fell outside of our targets. (Scott)

Re-scheduling to when it secondly suited the school. (Jackie)

Right, but we had the option of doing it when it suited the school.....that's the bottom line isn't it? However, for our reasons, which now turns out they're not our reasons, we don't need them, we had to put pressure, I had to put pressure on the school to do it so that it fell within this target area. (Scott)

And, the research on group work, which I know quite well, shows that that's an issue - that schools sometimes feel that they're accommodating careers service demands rather than career needs.

I just wanted to say, the most embarrassing moment I've ever had..... is being in the staff room, speaking to a careers co-ordinator, and saying 'well look I've spoken to my manager, and we really need these targets' and the careers co-ordinator shouting across the staff-room to the Head of Year, 'They need this for their targets', and if there was a hole there I would have fallen into it. I'm trying to say well it's not just our targets actually, a good idea but. (Scott)

But that wasn't what was heard.

Oh no, not at all, that was said across the staff-room quite honestly. (Scott)

But I think that in general terms, there have been a great majority of cases where we don't actually say to schools, "We need to do these activities because we've got targets to meet". In general, we're doing it because the schools want this and I would like to say that very strongly. (Jackie)

This is an exceptional case, I accept that. (Scott)

...with one eye on targets as well. (George)

But that's what we do privately in most cases. (Jackie)

Yeah, we don't actually say that to the school, we need this, we need that. (George)

That's again.... that's part of the pressure isn't it, of managing what you feel is appropriate for the clients and making sense of those dual pressures.

Most of the time though I don't find that it is a great problem, most of the time I find that schools are very happy to have something that they perceive is benefiting their students.

If we are dealing with the sort of standards that they are happy with, they will go along with it and I don't see the conflict there really. (Jackie)

That's good, that's good. One thing that, you sort of mentioned, about apologising for being positive...

Not all the time.(Fiona)

Have you found anything to be a positive effect of the targets of the tariff? Again I can prompt if you want. You don't need much prompting.

We have actually, I don't know how things will work in the future, but I feel in the last few years we've actually been given quite a substantial degree of freedom in how we've organised our time so long as we met our targets, that maybe the product of the people who have been managing us. (Jackie)

Yes.

...at this period of time, but I rather like that and I rather like the fact that if I get done to a sufficient standard what I'm asked to do, I've got freedom to sort it out myself. (Jackie)

I think also, we've got a tremendously high profile in schools now that this has come about, ...we really are much more regarded now by the schools. (Harriet)

And not just by the schools,... the parents...and I think that the way you can see that the kids are coming and demanding .., in the nicest possible way, attention. (Jackie)

So then, there's an expectation of the level of service

And it's good. It's very good. (Jackie)

I think we've got a fair amount of kudos as an office because we do have targets. We've got pride in ourselves because we achieve our target where others don't. And I think particularly our 'Road-Show' programme has been a very good team-working activity. We design it, we evaluate it every year, we fine tune it and then we deliver it as teams and it wouldn't work if we didn't work as a team. There's everybody saying; "Well yes I can do that day", and "Yes I can do other things but I can help you on that day". When you think of how often you're isolated...alone in school working, not quite part of the school, just on your own ..winkling your way through. (Jackie)

Absolutely...

...to get done what you need to..actually going in with a group of other people to have a little crack with... and doing something together is nice. (Jackie)

Do you think it's had any positive benefit on the guidance process? For example one of the things that came out from the questionnaire was 'Its made'...I quote.., It's made clients do more for themselves' and another quote I didn't always do everything for the client'.

So, there was this idea .of this fostering client responsibility and autonomy. Have you found any difference as how you do guidance?

I think you do make the client do more but I think in some cases it's not a good thing. (Fiona)

It's not a good thing?

Not a good thing because I think sometimes, I often get the feeling that in the olden days, I would have had a bit more time to spend on certain clients ...like I used to...(Fiona)

I think you don't always have time for the clients...it's the follow up for those who really need it...that really need it... alright once, but to follow them up 2 or 3 times.(Harriet)

It just doesn't happen. Will that change with the re-focusing of the careers service?

It should do..but I don't...(Harriet)

Don't really know. (Fiona)

(LAUGHTER)

That's one of the theories ...yes. (Harriet)

This is so nebulous at the moment. People keep mentioning to me...working with Year 7 and 8 and I'm not quite sure how this is going to assist me in following up people that need extra help as they are coming towards a transition. I love to work with Year 7, they're very sweet... (Jackie)

But I am actually concerned with re-focusing that we...we don't know what we're doing. Whereas I think we should be going to greater depths .., down certain channels with certain groups and I know that's there but the tendency is that we're probably gonna .. we're gonna grab the bits of guidance and say work with these, work with them and doing little bits here and thereand the whole things gonna be diluted... (Harriet)

And a couple of years down the road, they'll probably find they've chucked the baby out with the bathwater. (Jackie)

What....you see as being diluted is an intensive one-to-one thorough guidance interview?

An actual guidance process, where you are there to follow up those that really need following up. I mean, I think there will be a nucleus of hard cases and then we'll be doing a bit with Year 7, sort of preventative work but there's going to be quite a bulk of people that actually slip through that net. (Harriet)

That is almost inevitable really. (Jackie)

Yes. So in a sense you're saying, the bit that guidance workers do like no one else does is in danger of being lost?

Generally speaking the students' respond to having 40 - 50 mins. with somebody who actually talks to them and talks to them about their ambitions and all the rest of it.. I mean, you can get the most difficult kid in school...have them in a one to one interview. In their interview it's completely different. (Terry)

We have such a different relationship with them compared to everybody else in the school, so different, so different. I think it's so valuable, satisfying. (Fiona)

Yeah it is, that's right. (Terry)

The other thing it seems to me is that the way that we've been working or that we've seen virtually everyone in probably Year 10 and 11, kids that are, sort of, 'iffy' about coming...certainly wouldn't have wanted to keep coming back and being singled out for being followed- up, are just slipping along with all the rest of them and making friends with us really and not looking obvious about it and I think they could actually be more reluctant to come forward. (Jackie)

Because it's a process of continuous presence not a, sort of, crisis intervention.

One professional, only one, commented 'There's no reward if the targets are met and no sanctions if they're not met'. What do you think about that as people who meet their targets?

I don't know how long it could have gone on for with people's goodwill, but everything's changing anyway. (Jackie)

In this office, there would be a sanction if you didn't meet your targets. It wouldn't be like a formal one, everyone sort of works together and you would be the odd person out. (George)

And you'd feel that?

Yes I think you would. (George)

What would happen [vignette one, long term sick leave] How does that work get done?

We have actually had to re-deploy staff this year, from the labour market team and the education team and then back to the labour market team. (Fiona)

Right.

And can you remember ...can you remember what happened when Isabelle came out of [local school], Maggie and I picked up her work in [local school] for a term and just did extra. (Jackie)

Helped a probationer...(Terry)

I think having the two-team system does actually give a little bit more flexibility if we all have, you know duty days, but I think that the sort of problems that your referring to are more likely to occur where people, sort of, negotiate their group work in a very individual way. For instance, Thursday at 1.30p.m. there always has to be a careers adviser in that school. (Harriet)

Right.

So, if they are off sick, then there's not going to be anybody to cover. If you organise your group work in a little more of a flexible way, then either it could be postponed 'til you're back, or other arrangements can be made, or you could have a road-show type of effort, then you could call somebody in from somewhere else. (Harriet)

There are issues really for the way the agreement is negotiated. (Fiona)

We also work across the area as well. We sometimes help out [neighbouring office within careers company] at Road Shows and sometimes they'll do the same for us. (George)

But it's clear from what you're saying, you don't feel it's a personal responsibility, but an office responsibility. It wouldn't fall on your shoulders to do it, you would be able to call in help.

We have to ask. (unattributed)

(LAUGHTER)

We've all had to do, particular last summer, lots more cover in the office. We were actually all given targets for it so we've all exceeded our own targets. (Fiona)

Yeah, we've done it. (Jackie)

Right.

In another focus group, they were so desperate, they had to ask a manager to help out...

Oh we've had that and they volunteer, our managers volunteer. They come and help do Road Shows. Phil used to come in and do Road Shows. (Fiona)

But that causes an issue as to whether managers are qualified. (Harriet)

Absolutely.

It's a trend. (Harriet)

Have three of them now? Yes, it's a trend. (Jackie)

Yes, it goes against the notion of multi-skilling ways.

Instead of saying "Oh targets don't really tell the full story", perhaps we need to be clear about what would tell the full story. So, what do you feel would be useful measures to show the work that you do?

Contact hours. (unattributed)

Yes.

Response rates. By that I mean by people coming to you or people attending..., attendance, levels of attendance. Perhaps, I don't know, something like attendance if you run a special event for parents. I'm thinking about people queuing up outside the door again. All sort of soft information. (Jackie)

It has to have come from somewhere and I guess it's the perceiving... and people perceiving usefulness of a certain quality. (Harriet)

Referrals. (unattributed)

So, some kind of either tracking of client satisfaction, clients that have parents there in schools and how people know about us. Is it word of mouth? Is that working? What about long term tracking, would you see any mileage in that?

Tracking what? Their destinations? (Harriet)

Destinations and actually asking them 'Do you remember what happened in the careers interview?'

The problem with that is actually getting rid of the other factors influencing decisions, you know, the circumstances, you know, whether somebody actually ends up in this job or that job. (Harriet)

Exactly.

And how do you get rid of all those other areas that are actually 'fuzzing' the outcome? (Harriet)

It's also continuity. You look at 7 - 13, is one person going to be involved and who's the person whose work reaction is important? (Fiona)

Or would it be the same person between, Year 7 - 11? It's unlikely, in most cases, that somebody would be linked to one establishment for perhaps five years and they see a different face.... and kids don't make connections terribly easily. (Jackie)

Some of the things that you've talked about there are how much people know you and how widely they've recommended you. OK.

One of the things that came up in the last focus group was the impact of information technology. Have you any comments to make on I.T?

Well, I don't use a laptop in interviews because I interview in college and I haven't got a modem. (Fiona)

Right.

And I would actually desperately like to be able to do it. (Fiona)

Right.

It's a pain. (Fiona)

Why would you like to be able to do it?

Because then I would be finished with the job and the Action Plan actually within that time. I've got to come back and then I've got to put details on the computer. I can get the typing done but sometimes, depending on staffing, that can't be done within five working days, so I do it myself. (Fiona)

Yeah.

And then everything's got to be written in a way that someone else can understand it quite easily so, I would actually like that facility. (Fiona)

I think credibility - with the computer being there-with this.. the generation we've got... apart from the practical issues. (Harriet)

[Rachel bids goodbye to a practitioner who leaves the session early to attend a Parents Evening] Thanks very, very much. I hope it goes well.

I think I'd be desperate if I didn't have the technology to work with actually. I would hate, not to have it, but the only thing is when I'm going through certain screens on the computer, and that.., managing information systems, which is how people can actually see what I've been doing and there's an awful lot of that that you're doing that perhaps a client in an interview doesn't really see the end result. But there's an awful lot of positives. I know, for instance, that lap-tops are going to have CD-ROM facilities which will mean that you can use...(Jackie)

Kudos? [a computer program for careers work]

Well, you already can use Kudos but I could perhaps add Ecctis on it. You know, where school's facilities aren't wonderful, we've got this instead. (Jackie)

Are there any problems of, what do you call it, down-loading?

Or uploading. (Fiona)

Exactly

Rarely. (Jackie)

Rarely?

Now that's really frustrating back at the office, rather than... (Terry)

Exactly.

..so it's away from the interview process.(Terry)

But, is that an issue in this office?

Yeah...Occasionally...Yes. (Terry, Jackie, Harriet)

I mean, when it does occur. (unattributed.).

I've had a laptop die on me in the middle of an interview. It's very irritating but.(George)

Yes because the more it works the more you rely on it so when the slightest thing goes wrong it's... (Terry)

I do sometimes think that people criticise it most are the people who haven't got to grips with it. (Jackie)

Were you given any training?

We did have some training and we were asked to do some more but. (Jackie)

And I think lots of things change and the problem is the instructions. (Fiona)

I had a day...(Terry)

'Cos they're being continually being updated?

Yeah. A lot that you learn is from colleagues isn't it? (Terry)

Yes, absolutely, OK.

Everyone would get a lot more proficient if they had little more time and space to spend on the package. (Jackie)

If you had two minutes to talk to the Government office or the DfEE, what message would you like to get across to them?

[Gives name of Local Government Office] is a silly name! (George)

(LAUGHTER)

You've got to be a bit careful here of being not too subjective of what's happening at the moment, because I actually think that what we've done over the last couple of years is a constant... we've had a set of goal posts that's stood still but a constant tightening up. I feel actually as if we've made considerable progress over the years and the profile's raised and everything else and then suddenly, with the change of Government, the goal posts are moving completely and that's a bit sad really. They should be looking more positive; building more on. (Jackie)

I would say something about the possible loss of the interview. Because it sounds to me, you know, we don't know, I don't know yet what's going to happen, but it sounds to me that an individual interview for everybody is not going to happen in the future and I think that's a real shame because lots of people who wouldn't actually qualify for the 'hard to help', you know, title, but they need help. (Fiona)

The percentage of drop out that we're given on the GNVQ course, it quite a lot, and the high percentage suggests that it's just not the difficult kids in schools, it's the youngsters on paper appears ...to get through everything. (Terry)

From what he was saying, those percentages that were being given, it looked like the majority to me. ... were people that fell into this category and not being settled. However, if you actually think about pressures on us, suddenly now the pressures of completely switching the way you work is going to be far more intense because of meeting some figures. (Jackie)

Yes.

We've got that tied down now. We know how to do that now. (Jackie)

Anything else?

OK, that's really as many questions that I want to ask. Thank you again, very, very much for all your time.

Is there anything finally that you want to say that I haven't given you the chance?

I don't think so. (Jackie)

No, I don't think we know too much about the future. (Fiona)

Thanks, very, very much indeed. It's been a great help. I can't wait to analyse that tomorrow.

(LAUGHTER)